COMFORT AND COUNSEL

SERMONS BY
THE LATE RIGHT REVEREND
WILLIAM DAVID WALKER

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Comfort and counsel; sermons

COMFORT AND COUNSEL

The Late Right Reverend
WILLIAM DAVID WALKER, D.D., LL.D., D.C.L.
Vicar of Calvary Chapel, New York City, 1862–1883
First Missionary Bishop of North Dakota, 1883–1896
Third Bishop of Western New York, 1896–1917

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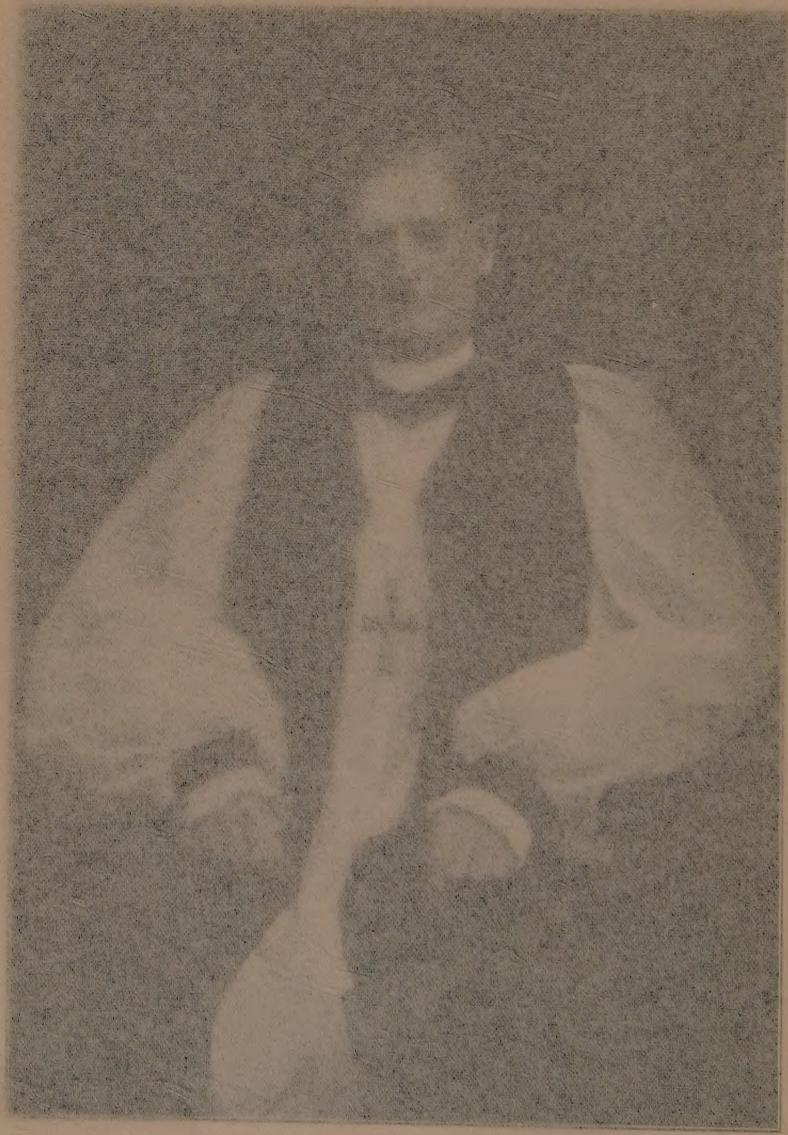

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This volume is dedicated to the Laymen's Missionary League of Buffalo, in grateful recognition of their devotion and Christian zeal, in bringing to many villages, hamlets and small communities of Western New York the comforting and helpful messages of the Church.

✠

Preface

In the service of fifty-five years at God's Altar, thirty-four of which were lived as Chief Shepherd, the writer of these sermons had for the dominant keynote in all his ministrations and messages the great desire to help man so to live in this life, that he might be accounted worthy for the Life Eternal.

The intimate knowledge acquired during this more than half century as Deacon, Priest and Bishop, shows a keen and vivid insight for all the weaknesses and temptations of human nature; and the practical counsels contained in this volume, for the help and comfort of every phase of trial and sorrow, may still be a guide to the many who often listened to the voice, now silent, but which yet speaks the kindly influence and encouragement for Christian living.

From the rich treasury, but a few sermons have been selected. Some, written, when in the first flush and enthusiasm of young manhood, amidst the teeming activities of twenty-one years' ministry in the Metropolis; others, during

the thirteen years on the plains and prairies in the then isolated Missionary District of North Dakota, serving the children of the red skin and their pale faced brothers; and a few gathered from the twenty-one strenuous years devoted to his beloved Diocese of Western New York, where the manifold duties, problems and activities never prevented the careful preparation of a message for his people.

If these words of God's faithful and cheerful servant, whose chief happiness lay in the service of his Master, can still bring comfort, counsel and peace to the sorrowful, the bereaved, the tempted and the doubting, the earnest desire for their publication will have been accomplished for the compiler,

HIS WIFE.

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THE HEAVENLY HOME.

*In my Father's house are many mansions * * * * * I go to prepare a place for you."*

ST. JOHN XIV. 2.

There is something practical and comforting in this announcement of our dear Master. It teaches no abstraction, no theory: it shows us no carnal or mythical visions of Heaven. No! It is a home; the house of our Father where our Lord and the saints are to dwell in the "many mansions." Ah! This idea suggests sweet associations—tenderness, love, peace, rest. It is a home: the place of gentle relationships, the place where the heart is warmest and freest and purest. This is the truth that the blessed Master reveals to us. And it tells a more glorious fact than even the Apocalypse with all its visions of splendor and glory discloses. And as we trace it in its depths of meaning it will give the heart the hope and the knowledge it craves and in which it will find rest. May the Holy Spirit help us in our endeavor to know this truth today.

We learn first, the fact of the personal, real existence of the departed. We cannot know, indeed, when our loved ones leave this world, into what region of God's universe they go: whether "the rest that remaineth" is near us or

distant: whether the fancy is true that the departed mother folds her spirit-wings about her infant darling and guides its tottering steps, or the sainted sister smiles upon each victory, standing side by side with her warring brother on the battle-ground of life: whether the "cloud of witnesses" that keep ward over the believer's strugglings and temptings hover near as he fights or watches the conflict from the battlements of some far away citadel where a Moses and a Daniel, a John the Baptist and a Paul and a saintly host who have fought well look on with anxious hope—this is all mystery. We believe that there is a mansion where the departed souls rest, awaiting the day when they shall reach the perfect consummation and bliss. But it is vain for us to reason where it is, or how it is separate from Heaven. We only know it is and that it is the tarrying place of martyr throngs, the virgin saints who have "fallen asleep in Jesus," and the blessed dead of the ages who have pledged their fealty to the cross, and being buried with Christ shall rise with Him, too.

This is our confidence: the holy dead are in the world of Him who is "God not of the dead but of the living." If we could only listen to God's voice speaking to us through all Nature, here the drop of water, there the clod of earth, each breath of air, the very grain of dust, all crowded with an unseen existence, as strange, as wonderful as the farthest star hung out in space—we would learn that these eyes reveal

not all of life that palpitates around. And may there not be a spiritual world lying all about us where angels and saints with no gross raiment of earth but with the pure vesture of a heavenly world hover near? May not the old Hebrew fancy have some foundation in fact, that each nursling or patriarch, the wise or the lowly—every member of the brotherhood of man has his watchful angel folding white wings around him as he walks onward, guarding each step, protecting, shielding, tenderly lifting, loving, helping through all the changes and cares and conflicts of this life of struggle and pilgrimage.

But we would only dwell upon this possible fact so as to disabuse you of that false feeling which looks upon the departed as unreal and shadowy in their existence. This is what we need, to lift our minds from our earthly thought of them as cold dumb tenants of the grave, to think of them as conscious, personal beings dwelling with our unseen Lord, in the home of our Father and His Father. In that conception we are happy. That throws sunlight upon the tomb. It bathes the little mound in the churchyard with a glory not of earth. It makes the parting less bitter. We can dry our tears as they flow and find David's comfort in that dear hope which was an angel's whisper to him in his bereavement. "I shall go to him but he shall not return to me." With this confidence we do not ask where they are: we know what they are. "We shall be like Him," saith the Apostle's

promise. We look on the face of that Incarnate Lord—as He was, a man on the earth,—as He is now in the splendor of His risen glory—the same Divine mind, the same holy heart the same unchanged, pitying, loving Saviour. We cannot think of Him, though now glorified, as other than He was; the same sympathies on His throne that beat in His bosom as when He laid His head in a cottage at Nazareth, wept at Bethany or sat at the board of Publicans and sinners: the same feeling humanity up in Heaven to console others, tried and suffering, that could here on earth pity and lift up a prostrate Magdalen, a kneeling leper, a heart-broken Publican, a sinning woman of Samaria. Ah! no other portrait of the dear Saviour can satisfy these hungry, aching souls. When we shall see Him as He is we feel that we must behold Him as He was when infants gathered about Him unawed, when a John could lay his head on His bosom and feel loving heart-throbs, when a Mary could sit at His feet and find serene repose, the human Saviour, the man that feels for us and suffers with us, and the God that pities and pardons us poor sinners.

And so as we think of our own dear departed we feel that Death cannot have changed them in anything that makes them personal beings, beings who think and feel, who remember and hope, who love and enjoy. If it were not so it would destroy the very possibility of bliss in Heaven. For what would life here or hereafter

be without thought and love? Only a beast's elysium, an epicurean's dream; no *real* happiness, only the sensualist's full cup of pleasure. And it is yet more, this truth which gives to the Christian heart the assurance of a bodily, as well as a spiritual, resurrection. We cannot think of that eternal state as but a bodiless existence: for then we must lose all the personal reality. We cannot conceive of those minds, those hearts we have loved, without linking them with the faces we looked on and the voices that have never died from our remembrance, whose tones still ring in our ears with the old thrill. Who does not recognize in this the very craving of his heart? You may think you find logic against it but the soul hopes it will be realized still. Who finds not a sweet comfort in the faith that he shall yet see in Heaven the same smile of his mother, the same precious look of a sainted child or wife, of a dear pastor or teacher or friend, a fairer beauty; a form where there is no earthly blemish, no frailty, no weakness, but the same living shrine of the living loved one.

But I pass to a farther relation of this truth. Such a state must be one of living activity also. It cannot be a dumb chrysalis condition. That idea is repugnant to every notion of the revelation of Christ. We conceive there must be memories of the past, recognitions of each other. When we read of our Heaven as a Father's home, it brings before us at once the

thought of fellowship, mutual love, interchange. The Apostle tells us there is "no night there," one endless day, one waking activity. The Scripture speaks of the dead as "Asleep in Jesus"; but it does not mean by this a state of dull slumber. It would imply by it the sweetest image of death—that it is not utter extinction, not loss of life, but rest from the cares of earth—as when we lie down to refresh ourselves after the weariness of the day—a rest that ushers us into another dawn, a short passage from life to life. Heaven is not a place for cold, indifferent hearts. Its bliss springs, even as with the ascended Saviour, from a present love, a ceaseless thought of all He loved and yet loves upon earth. It is not for these few poor years that God has given us these tender ties; to be only withered flowers, sources of bitterness; not in vain that we have bent over the sick-bed and seen, one by one, our hopes decay while our love grew stronger in death. If it were so, this life were a mystery that even the promise of another could not make glad. But in this faith we find true comfort. We may believe that they who were our helpers and our joys here, beat with the same human pulses, look upon us now and will welcome us hereafter with the same brightening eye, the same yearning love, the same undying spirit.

And here, dear brethren, we reach the largest meaning of this truth. It is a communion of the saints of God. What a splendor, and love,

and beauty, and bliss, and sanctity, does that thought suggest! The picture of a golden city with its amethyst gates, its sea of glass, its riches and majesties fade before the splendor of this portrait of a Father's home. It speaks of the very heart and life of our life—fellowship, interchange, love. It shows us an abode peopled with the pure and the lovely and the holy. God is there. Jesus is there. Ah! that were enough, that were full satisfaction. To see eye to eye that dear Saviour; to kneel and clasp His feet, like her of Magdala; to listen to His voice, like Mary; to feel His hand on our heads in blessing, like the babes of Palestine; to follow Him like the Apostle-band, whithersoever He goeth. Ah! that were bliss to make glad eternal ages, that were solace, peace unutterable, joy forever and ever.

But here we pause, how poor our visions, how weak our conceptions of that knowledge, that bliss, that life. They know Him, for they are in Him: Christ is theirs and they are Christ's. O, blessed, happy state. We know not now; but we shall know hereafter.

Oh! to reach that glory and peace and love! How worthy every sacrifice, how worthy every labor. How does every straining and every struggle, every deed and every word, though the holiest, though the most steadfast in our power seem as no purchase for such a splendor. And yet it is God's promised gift to you, to me—offered, pledged, sealed to every one of us—if

only we will accept it. No price, no money needed for its purchase. It is a free gift! It is a loving gift. The King has made ready one of the "many mansions" for each.

Yes! every kneeling penitent, every broken-hearted wanderer, every obeying saint, each patient and struggling and loving soul that has come out from the battle-field—yes! though wounded and scarred, though the victim of many a defeat and many a fall—each has a worshipping-place in the grand Cathedral above which is the eternal Temple of the Everlasting Saviour. Each has a home among the many mansions in that blessed realm where He reigns who is the loving Father of all the children of God.

CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

ROMANS XV. 1.

We learn in this noble chapter of St. Paul a practical lesson on our duty among our fellow-men. The large spirit of a great heart is displayed and we admire the nobleness of noble Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

As we read his works we see constantly manifested the character of a man strong, positive, almost unyielding in his opinions. As with most persons of his temperament we should look rather for lack of sympathy with those of a different tone of feeling, especially with such as are described in our chapter. Yet we find the very contrary. He is tender even toward their weaknesses, generous in his tolerance, and studious of peace.

We learn that there were certain strifes, such as were common in every Christian community, among these brethren at Rome. It seems that some of them had certain notions about days and about food. They were perhaps a more severe class of Jewish Christians who still observed their own Sabbath and clung to divers ceremonial ideas about abstinence from wine and meat. They were probably earnest

Christian men, but had not minds ample enough, nor learning sufficient to comprehend the Apostle's liberty, and doubtless they were very suspicious of their Gentile brethren who had been educated without a special reverence for a Hebrew Sabbath or for Mosaic statutes or fasting. It was no denouncing voice with which St. Paul spoke to them, nay, rather, with a noble-hearted love for Christ and his brethren. He saw that their weakness did not destroy their real piety and that if he was of clearer and wiser judgment it was his duty more readily to make allowance. And hence he gives his advice to others who were disposed to quarrel over these lesser things. If the gem has not the cutting of the lapidary and the setting of the goldsmith which give it its fuller beauty he would not therefore fling it away as a worthless pebble. The dress is not the man. The outward rite is not necessarily the devotion.

Here then, my brethren, St. Paul gives us all an instruction on charity for even the prejudices and infirmities of our fellow-men. I would show how we may make it a practical rule in our judgment.

It is requisite, however, at the outset to state the rule clearly. This liberty, this tolerance of the Apostle is not to be mistaken for any false spirit of compromise in regard to principles. Turn to the sentence, "We that are strong, etc." He claims his right in regard to these days

and observances, but puts his yielding on the ground of surrender in matters where no principle is at stake—for the sake of unity—that it might be no divided household, but one united family in Jesus Christ. There was none who when summoned to defend the essential truth of Christianity was firmer in his decision. If it be a question of allowing the legalist to place the yoke of circumcision on the new convert he is unyielding. Is it the surrender of liberty to those who would exclude Gentiles from the table of Christ? Then he rebukes them to their face. We must learn that lesson first of all, unflinching maintenance of the principles of the Gospel. It is cowardice to yield a hair for the sake of peace, or unity, or any other reason when it is at the cost of principle.

There are certain Churchmen who when a question arises about Liturgical extravagances, are loud in their demand for charity. They want what they denominate *Catholic* allowance for their usages or their dogma, but seek to tie up those also who do not agree with them in the straight-jacket of their notions. It is not then charity. The honest may not yield to such. There are on the other hand the men who would fling down the Church's barrier, men who would open the doors to error; men who claim a liberty for a lawless license or a stubborn self-preaching, a dogma which is not of the truth of the Word or of Christ's Church. There is a fixed law: there

is a changeless truth. Liberty is surest and best not in breaking these but in the careful observance of them. To violate to the least hairbreadth a principle, is not the spirit of St. Paul's maxim.

Freedom in these concerns means not a liberty of error. There is one practical standard whereby we are to judge. If, for example, there be a ceremony, a costume, an act of worship which distinctly represents a falsehood, it is not charity to the weak that requires an allowance, it is indifference to truth to permit it in silence. Or if, on the other hand, there be an open assault or tampering with the doctrines or laws of the Church—then charity does not excuse our silence. No! I know no such charity as that to be healthy or honest. If this were a Christian sentiment we should have no dividing lines between truth and falsehood. Every article of the Creed would be swept from its moorings. Every command of the Decalogue would be blotted from the stone tables engraven by the finger of God. There are many outward things, not essential in themselves which become of vast moment as they represent ideas or opinions. A bit of red cloth is nothing; but let it be hung on a flag-staff and flung out to the breeze, and it becomes the banner of a cause. It may be the sad symbol of the rebel's crime, or it may be the noble emblem of a nation's being. Here is a bit of paper. In itself it means nothing. But affix the state seal to it or write on it the king's signature and it is a pardon for a man

doomed to death or a commission for a prime minister giving him first rank in the kingdom. It was the answer of the Christian in Nero's time or Diocletian's day when the Roman proctor urged him to cast a few grains of incense on the heathen altar, "No, I can do naught that is understood to be an act of worship toward any, save the One Lord God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent into the world to save me a sinner, and who is God over all blessed for ever."

And so we cannot practice anything which is understood to symbolize a falsehood. The freedom, as men and Christians, we would give and the freedom we would claim is not this indifference.

But with this understanding of the liberty we can understand the allowance. We have each learned in our intercourse with men, that there are many who though sincerely devout and conscientious in their convictions, yet by their peculiar disposition, by want of education, by a narrowness not strange, yet much to be regretted, are nevertheless unable to see truth save through their short-sighted glasses. You find it in their notions of Christian faith. They have learned it from some small or half-informed teacher: they associate the truth with certain phrases of this book or that pulpit; and all else has a suspicious sound if it be not spoken in their exact dialect with their private shibboleths. Yet these are worthy believers in the Gospel of Christ and members of His own dear Church.

Or you see it in their ideas of a religious piety. This one identifies it with a certain style of life, with a rigid abstinence in regard to amusement and dress and speech. That regards it as bound up with certain florid forms of worship. It is difficult to shatter such prejudices. They become part of the religion and we cannot always tell how far the sound branch or the mere excrescence has the stronger hold. Indeed it would be difficult for any here in this Church now, if he studies himself, not to recognize the fact that he is more or less hampered with some one or another such prejudice. We cannot expect to find in others more than ourselves a purely reasonable mind, a freedom from these personal weaknesses.

And above all, if we are of those whom St. Paul denominates "the strong," if we profess to be intelligent and wise and fixed in our principles, we shall learn that it is our special part to heal such discord by our large spirit. It is always the weak, the infirm who have least charity. Those who see truth through their small microscope, that believe there is no truth beyond them; those who need to be held up by the buttress of their party, or who think the cause of Christ is falling down unless propped by themselves; those who cannot afford to allow anything to others because they have no principles stronger than their prejudices; as a sick man often wishes to make everyone follow his diet. Invalids are always exacting. Health makes us generous

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because we are strong enough to bear. And so if I am sure of my Christian convictions, I shall trust in God and God's truth. If I have learned to battle with any infirmities and gain that self-poised courage and manliness I shall have a wiser heart to help others. We want the Apostle's kindly rule. I cannot more than allude to a few instances where it is applicable.

Look at it in our questions of *religious truth*. "Them that are weak," says the Apostle, "receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." There are many deep and weighty points of Christian belief which are not to be made subjects of free, incautious criticism. We should never conceal the opposite sides of truth, the doubts and inquiries of the time from any who have minds to examine them. But surely we are to be as careful regarding them who are not fitted for such doubts, in regard to their intellectual and spiritual food as we should in supplying them with wholesome diet at our tables. "If a child ask bread will ye give him a stone?" It is Christian wisdom above all with the young to guard them from the pollution of error, to give them the simple and nourishing food, the positive, definite truth their souls need. And so with many older minds which are sincere and devout, but not full-grown in wisdom. I know no maxim more needful for the pulpit. It is untrue to its responsible office when it forgets that it is to *feed the flock*. Not with indigestible speculation, not with discussions that may raise more doubts

than they can settle, but with the "Bread of life."

But there are many ways in which this kindly rule appeals to us. It should be remembered when we converse of religious truth with those who differ from us. I would never undermine the belief of any, however I might think it mistaken, if I felt that to shake the conviction might leave the mind in doubt and pain, unless it were a case where the error was a fatal one. I would not even take away the belief of a sincere Romanist unless I first planted a deeper faith in the heart. And above all we are to learn that it is a most unchristian thing to meet any with scorn or bitterness. We can never drive men to conviction. We can never laugh them into faith. Strive to deal patiently with a mistaken mind, enter into its prejudices, joyfully welcome any kernel of truth amid the piles of chaff—if there be unbelief, lead it kindly on to sunlight—if there be intemperate bigotry seek for some common ground of Christian affection. Never forget that little allegory of the sun and the wind which agreed together to strip off the traveler's cloak. It was the sun that thawed it off, while the blast blew it closer. And if we cannot succeed in making everyone believe as we do, let us never forget that after all each stands or falls to his own Master.

But, too, it is a law which should apply to religious action. The prejudices and weaknesses of Christian persons are peculiarly difficult to

meet and bear. There are some who can deal with them only with the sledge-hammer. This, alas! is a most mischievous error. We must not, of course, call their weaknesses virtues. We are never to omit any good or kindly opportunity to improve them. But we should never forget that maxim of St. Paul; "To him that esteemeth anything unclean to him it is unclean." A conscientious prejudice is still a *conscientious* one. We are to treat it as such, as something to be tenderly handled. If any brother hold certain pet ideas as to what a Christian man's robe or diet should be, must I shock him or anger him by my contradiction? I can exert my best influence with him when I exhibit to him, by my action, that I respect and love his sincerity. In many cases my freedom may not be best for others. I may think the revival system a bad one, but I cannot rightly declare that all its converts are deceived. I may believe the use of a crucifix perilous, but I must allow much for education and not judge all such worshippers to be idolators. Many demand more safeguards than others to keep them faithful. Many require in daily life, and in Christian life aids that may seem to us superfluous and yet they are necessities to them. But we are prone too much to forget all this. We wish always to bind our own chains of habit—whether they be freer or more rigid—on all for their law. We are very apt in our early years to have some perfect plan of the Church, or of the Christian life, and we are sorely

impatient because we can not see it realized. But after we have had our rough angles smoothed by contact with others as rough as our own, after we have learned that we cannot shape human nature after our private fancy, we gain a wholesome lesson. It need not make us temporizing. But may we not expect to be less assuming in our temper and less selfish in our expectations? He who thinks that he can change all the follies or errors of men or parties in the Church during his lifetime has not large insight into human nature and less into his own.

This is a truth well to be learned in the Church. There are hundreds of little strifes that nothing will heal but a well-understood liberty. Real peace may not be brought by an iron conformity. Let us be more strenuous to maintain our living faith in Christ. Let the spirit of a generous love and freedom prevail. Give us St. Paul's unity of spirit and St. Paul's charity together. I mean not looseness, not want of loyalty to Christ's Gospel and Christ's Church, but love and tender consideration for the convictions and the zeal of our brethren in the Lord. This has been and is, and alone will be, the bond of the Church of God.

I conclude the theme with St. Paul's noble speech "*not* to *please ourselves*." Ah, yes! if we thought more often of that it would be well. How many rigid definitions of faith, how many harsh criticisms of action, how much cant of party, if we go deep down into the controlling

motive are that—self-pleasing—and nothing else. What eloquent defences of so-called Gospel! What fervid assaults on so-called errors! What madcap enthusiasms for a principle, which means to please our opinion, our party, our little system of Church polity, our private notion of doctrine and life.

Yes! let us look to it that we endeavor to please God: and perhaps we shall learn that to please Him most, is not to make ourselves His vicegerents in our shallow judgment, but to drink more of His own patience, His own charity to the good and to the evil.

THE BIBLE.

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM CXIX. 105.

At the great Council of Nice assembled in the year 325, where 318 Christian Bishops gave their testimony regarding the doctrine of Jesus handed down in their respective Churches from the beginning; in that Council where our august Nicene Creed was born, a judgment throne was set, on an elevated dais. It confronted all eyes. It occupied the place of chiefest honor. It spoke authority. It was not the Bishop of Rome who filled it, nor the Metropolitan of Antioch, nor even the Patriarch of Jerusalem itself. No mitred potentate, no saintliest son of man, sat thereon. By universal voice it was to be the seat for royal decision, the place of holy and infallible judgment. God's sacred Word only could be the occupant of that authoritative chair. And so a copy of the Scriptures was placed there. The Holy Bible alone was enthroned in that first Ecumenical Council of the Church of the Divine King.

This is a picture of the young Church, little regarded and little known by her children today. I would proclaim and accentuate the sovereignty of the sacred Scriptures.

We are exhorted by the skeptic and the half-hearted preacher of the time not to exalt our Bible into a superstitious fetich. We are warned by our critics of the inaccuracies upon its annals. My self-satisfied scientific sage, tries to show a blot on the page and a flaw in the record here and there. And some elegant agnostic, with a superior condescension, declares its possible truth, and its probable error and glories in his own magnanimity and his genteel tolerance of it all. And finally some "liberal" scholar, who would deliver me from the precipice of "bibliolatry" warns me that our religion is not the faith of a book but of a person.

So poor mortals, created by God, redeemed by God, protected by God, having hope and cheer only through God, from the birth-cry to the death-gasp, disparage His Word and minimize His honor. O the ingratitude and the shame of such defiant and reckless sons!

It is a day of Bible-class enthusiasm; many a church is conforming to this new fashion. It has a respectable sound. But it has its peril for souls. The Bible is God's revelation to man. It is the Father's tender voice speaking to His children. But if the study of that Book be only sentimental, or for knowledge of customs and costumes and culture of certain early ages, then, while it is salutary as simple knowledge, it is not Bible study. Or, if the aim is to gain information of supposed flaws or defects, or contradictions; to subject God's Word to the

keen lancet of an unscrupulous criticism, to hack with a miner's rough pick and spade, the gold-vein of eternal truth; to undermine, with a foe's dynamite, the fair temple of religion which the Divine Architect has reared, then this is no Bible study. That beautiful and limpid rock crystal of heavenly wisdom is only to be grasped with a reverent and tender hand. It *is literature*. Yes! But of a divine texture and of a heavenly origin. The loyal disciple will not treat it with impious speech, any more than the ancient Hebrew would dare to touch the sacred Ark with a careless hand. The rich silken gauze of an Oriental loom must not be subjected to the common tests and uses of a blacksmith's leathern apron. It is not on the plane of Shakespeare's plays, or Macauley's essays, or Thackeray's novels. It stands apart and alone on a mountain crest where Heaven's eternal sunshine plays, and where the Almighty sits in majesty revealing his gracious pity and his abounding purity and love to the children of men.

Your Bible study! Its purpose should be to roll back the curtain of human dimness and doubt, and to reveal the Heavenly light. It should open my ears, which have been deafened by the din and agonies of the world, its wars and its horrors and its hate of today, to the everlasting Father's voice. It should show me the pale, patient face on the Cross looking down upon me with a tender, redeeming pity. It should open

the door of my Father's House, His Church—and show the seat reserved for me at His own gracious Table. It should show me the cleansing fountain at the portal, where, like the Syrian captain at the Jordan, I "may wash and be clean." It should show me the commissioned Ambassadors of His Kingdom, bearing His welcome to my halting and timid steps. It should show the center of my life and hope at His very throne, where I, a kneeling suppliant, may find the refreshing and life-giving manna that will cause my very soul to thrill with an unearthly joy.

But I hear some doubting mind asking: "Have not new-found manuscripts and fresh excavations, and reopened territory, shaken confidence, and blurred old belief in the infallible integrity of the Bible?" My answer is that in the last sixty years every exploration in Egypt, in Moab, in Babylonia, in Arabia, in Palestine, in Rome, has but confirmed Old Testament or New. Not one of the Archaeological researches of the modern day has clouded or dimmed Scripture testimony.

Are its advocates and its defenders only a priest-ridden coterie, or infatuated or hypnotized victims? Thank God, more and more is that sacred Book reclaiming the confidence and the loyalty of the world! Science claimed to have eclipsed it. Criticism, through parchments and papyri, and rock remains, and monuments, claimed to have ground it to powder. But it

stands amid the lashing billows of skeptic controversy higher lifted to the clouds than ever before—a Gibraltar rising unmoved in the colossal raging sea. Mr. Gladstone called it "the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture." Eloquent Archdeacon Farrar, in Westminster Abbey, said once, "No demonstrable and clear error has ever been found in the Bible."

Does Genesis trouble you? Have you translated and interpreted it aright? Is the intimate allusion to the nearest concerns of man's physical life, an offence? Ah! "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*" Does the deep spiritual philosophy of St. Paul confuse your thought at times? Remember that religion is ever clothed in some mystery and the cloth of gold which enwraps it is impenetrable to the careless and the reckless eye.

Do learned doctors of science shake your faith, as they flash their theory of evolution before your eyes? Are you aware that in that wonderful meeting of the British Association whose membership comprises the men of highest reputation and scholarship in the ranks of science, throughout the world, last summer, Darwin's and Huxley's theories were grappled with and worsted,—and rejected by a host? Has the Socialists' charge that the Bible and the Church have no heart for the suffering and the down-trodden called out in you a fellow sympathy with their unjust claim? Then listen to a voice that spoke from a mountainside and wept at a graveside and wrought miracles at a

lakeside—all in the interest, and with feeling sympathy, for the sorrow and the suffering and the sin that were in the world. That gentle voice cries to man everywhere: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." What has life presented as the outcome of the Bible touch? It shows the hand of man made more cunning and deft for material advancement of the race. It shows the mind of man made more keen to remove the troubling doubt and anxious concern from the perplexed brain. It shows the soul of man more alive and pitiful to the pain and the sorrow and the wrong of the weakest and the most wicked.

Give credit where you please for the outflow of manual skill or intelligent helpfulness or spiritual fire and consolation: but I would turn your eyes to the manifested force and initiative of that Book as its living pages and its loving sentiment confront human need anywhere—in a straw hut of Africa or a snow dwelling of an Eskimo, in an Aborigine's tepee, or in the palace of a titled noble, or in a weary laborer's cot. It touches to heal and to uplift and to dignify and to glorify. I would, therefore, that the Holy Bible lay on the desk in the assembly-room of every school or college of our fair land to be read as the morning sun casts its bright beams on the gathered youth of whatever name or age.

This is not politics, it is morals. It is for rounded manhood. It is for royal living. It is

for the ripening of a just and righteous nation, of a gracious and a grand humanity. So, I hold up my Bible before your eyes, like that of General Gordon's, which accompanied him in all the fierce wars of the Soudan as counselor, and comforter, and is today enshrined in a casket of crystal and gold in the library of Windsor Castle, giving heart to hosts of reverent souls gazing on its open pages. It tells the benign Fatherhood of the Father, to us His children. It sweeps away the dimming clouds of doubting centuries, to reveal the glory and the tenderness of the face and of the heart of Calvary. It wakens in the poor anxious, hopeless soul the sense of a holy Presence ready to blot away care wrinkles from the brow, and to heal each wound of these poor bruised and broken hearts.

Shall you not then reverence it, as you do that tress of flaxen hair, enshrined in the gemmed locket of gold which lies near your heart?

Shall we not read it with the awed spirit of Fra Angelico, who, as he painted on his glowing canvas, the face of an angel or of a madonna, knelt lowly on his knees?

Shall it not be to each of us, for all days to come, the book of light, the book of our love, the book of life?

And why? Because in it, we behold Him whom certain Greeks sought on that day, twenty centuries ago, as they addressed John and James and Andrew and Peter saying, "Sirs, we would see Jesus."

INEQUALITY.

"Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

St. Luke XVI. 25.

It is a perplexing problem today, as it was when this parable was spoken, why this great world of God presents this picture of a vast social inequality. We wonder now, as did men then, at the allotment which gives to one the wealth and luxury of life, and dooms another with equal or rarer gifts of mind and heart to the inevitable load of poverty.

Who makes us to differ? What shall unriddle the seeming partiality of such an arrangement of things, or is it a derangement? How far is it God's order, or our disorder? These are problems that try the heart of the wise man and of the Christian and which our precious Master answers in the parable. He gives no social theories, but a moral law that brings it home to us in that only way in which we can ever solve it, the way of our personal, our Christian duty.

To know the problem's solution we must first clearly understand the true meaning of the parable. It has too often been misinterpreted by expositors. Some have inferred that it

referred to the Jewish Church and the Gentile; the one proud, rich, yet excluded at last from Abraham's promise; the other poor, despised, but accepted. But while there may be a side of truth here, it surely cannot reach the individual purpose, the real heart of such a parable. It has often been held to be a description of the state of man in the future world.

Undoubtedly it affirms the truth of reward and punishment hereafter. But we must be careful not to press the imagery of this, or any such lifelike apologue, into too literal a sense. A parable is an imaginary narrative which conveys a moral truth under its fictitious character and dress. We must separate the truth from its costume.

Our Lord here used the common Hebrew ideas of the unseen world. Abraham's bosom was the beautiful name they gave to the Paradise where the souls of the holy rest; and separated by a pathless gulf was the abode of the wicked. We cannot then draw from the story any proof that there is a material fire because Dives speaks of the flame, any more than that the good literally rest in the arms of the patriarch. And again, it has been inferred by many without reason that there is a knowledge or communication between these abodes because Dives sees Lazarus afar off.

And it is above all revolting when we hear this gross view carried to such a point by a Christian divine as to declare, that part of the

happiness of the good will be in seeing and contrasting their own comfort with the pain of the lost.

But we must fix our thoughts on the solemn truths, the real lessons, that stand forth in the warm coloring of this story, on the characters here depicted with such a searching insight into the human heart.

It is declared that there is a future state which shall adjust the crooked ways of this; that this present world is full of mocking riddles to the skeptic, and sometimes so clouded even to the eye of the Christian. This life, where the good things and the evil things seem so strangely misplaced, the proud in fine linen at his banquet, and the good a beggar at his gate, is only for a season, but the even-handed justice of God shall make all things right.

I would desire then to draw your thought to the bearing of this great law of a Divine compensation. It is the design of Christ to show that our life is not to be merely one of self-loving ease, but of duty to God and men in every condition. It is not His meaning that the mere fact of worldly prosperity here is a reason of condemnation, or the fact of poverty a reason of happiness hereafter. It is by the will of God that this inequality exists, that this is rich and that is poor; and whatever may be the wrong mingled with this social state, whatever the wealth gotten by unjust means, the vast amount enjoyed by the slothful, the selfish, whatever

the sufferings of the needy, increased by the cruelty of men, it is folly to imagine that while human nature lasts there can ever be any perfect equality.

The equality of today would be confusion tomorrow. There must always be social suffering and dependence. Nor is there anything in the spirit of the Gospel to call forth that jealous hate of wealth or rank which we too often see in the world today. It is not money, but the "*love* of money," which is called the "root of evil." It is not outward poverty that Christ claims as akin to the virtue of the disciple; it is the "poor in *spirit*" not merely in purse, that He has chosen.

We may find as humble a heart throbbing under the fine linen as the beggar's rags. And alas! too often we see in the most abject mortal in his hovel, envy, and pride, and selfishness.

But we are not to draw from this that self-satisfied conclusion which leads so many to accept freedom from griping penury, or a competence, or large wealth, as if it were an allotment merely for our personal pleasure. This is the truth which Jesus Christ, who left His Father's glory for a life of sacrifice, declares in the picture of the rich man and Lazarus, that this inequality He has given us is to be the very bond of our brotherly duty.

I read there the social law that He has written on our nature when He made one rich and another needy; that we are thus to learn that our life is a stewardship, not an ownership.

That we are sacredly to feel that there are others to whom we owe our Christian love and our care, as given to our personal charge.

If we forget this, if we use what God has bestowed only for our own banqueting and ease, if we live only to be exempt from sacrifice, if we have all our good things in this life, we make the most fearful mistake, and the last day shall reverse the lot that our selfishness has abused.

It is only in such a view that the fact of social inequality becomes explainable at all. Even then it is often a strange, sad mystery. I suppose no Christian man, however benevolent, has not sometimes when he looked out on the terrible contrast, felt that his own riches and ease were laden with responsibility to make him most anxious.

And this is a fact again that grows most appalling as society becomes more advanced in luxury. It is the tendency of wealth ever to accumulate with the few; and of the lot of the poor to grow more and more fixed and indelible. It becomes at last a fact we cannot ignore. The poor remain poor. The rich are the few monopolists who by some wise stroke or rich ancestor have come to their good fortune, and their wealth gets wealth. Laws cannot cure it. Popular institutions cannot cure it. Only Christian duty can supply the social need. We can now turn to the full force of the story. We can learn the character of Dives' sin. Our Lord shows us that a mere forgetfulness, a selfish

neglect of duty, that this is the rich man's crime. As we read the story we shall observe that all its features are keen and lifelike. We make a very common mistake if we suppose this Dives a vicious man, an epicure, a sot, an oppressor of the poor. But we are told of no such special vices; nothing save that he wore fine linen and dined handsomely every day. We do not learn that he treated Lazarus with any personal cruelty, nay! that he even knew of the man's existence. But so far as we may judge he may have been a very reputable person, a Hebrew gentleman, of elegant manners and tastes, living in a brilliant social world, nay, perhaps a generous man, after the style of the gay world, who had always some scraps to feed the poor from his table.

You see him in the rich banquet hall, perfumed and anointed, clad in the purple gauze, the pride of Tyrian looms, while the servants bear rich fruits and wines cooled with the ice of Lebanon, and the breath of flowers is wafted from the garden, and wit and song chase the hours. And below at the gate in the hot sunshine lies the beggar, thankfully dividing with the dogs the bones flung in scorn by some pampered slave. His sin was this, that he lived in his luxurious world, seeking only good things to eat and drink and wear, forgetting that there was any world but that, not knowing and not troubling himself to know, whether a Lazarus lay at his gate or not, whether there

were men out in the street where his merry jest and laugh and song penetrated, ragged and starving and heavy-hearted, while he dreamt his specious dream. His life was without any but a selfish purpose, the denial of all God's purposes.

This is the picture. It is worth our study. Does it not speak thus a deeper truth than we usually read in it? We all agree that sensuality is a sin; that the hard-hearted oppressor of the poor is worthy of reproach. But this law of Christ goes farther. It says that not merely a life of dissoluteness or inhuman wrong makes a Dives; but that a selfish forgetfulness of duty to others is itself sin. The mere absence of open vices is not purity or holiness in Christ's eyes. To live for self is crime.

And when by this standard I look out at the world, in its sad scenes of suffering, I am convinced that the chief cause of social inhumanity may be found in such ignorance.

You need not, if you seek the meaning of this parable, go to the palace or the hovel of Jerusalem; you need only wander in quarters of this Vanity Fair.

And it is not the millionaire only who is Dives. It is every man with a competence who knows not of the needing brother at his door. Ah! it is no parable. What a living fact is it! What social contrasts does it depict, that make the heart of a Christian heavy with thoughts too deep for tears.

Here in his stately mansion sits the man of wealth; the walls sparkle with gems of art; fresh flowers load the air from the conservatory, and the choice dainties of the market are spread for fashionable guests. But what knows he of that other world that lies a few blocks away, where in dark rooms over a scanty table a haggard man sits with his children, dividing the coarse loaf his day's wages have bought, and brooding in silence over the morrow.

He never dreams of such a reality. He gives the crumbs, the fragments of his wardrobe, his dollar now and then for charity, but self-enjoyment is to him the end and aim of life. Ah, such coarse sights of sorrow never pierce the charmed seclusion of fashion; that soft life is a fastidious retreat from all the griefs of the world, and amid smiling friends and caresses he knows no more of others than if they were dwellers in some other planet.

And who made these to differ? Did He who gave one wealth and another poverty ordain this selfish severance of His children? Ah, this sad suffering of the world is not of His allotment, but of our neglect. That picture I have drawn is the faithful portrait of the worldly thousands who forget the purpose of their riches, and are guilty in their forgetfulness of a wrong they seldom measure.

Selfish enjoyment can harden the heart, as the light snow in the shaded hollows of the mountains grows year by year, and forms the glacier.

Charity becomes a chance feeling, which they dismiss with impatience as an intruder.

What sorrow and suffering which even Christian men and women know nothing of! What is too much of our benevolence but crumbs that fall from our full tables? How many kindly-hearted among us that never dream, or wake sometimes in sad surprise at the revelation of this social mystery of want and crime that surrounds us! It is a fearful blindness.

It is then alone we have learned the lesson of Christ when we have learned that to have wealth is to have duties to the poor; when we have learned how much richer the enjoyment of human hearts whom we have blessed than all our gold can buy; when, like our Master, we have done our humble part to make the sad world a Christian household.

And now let us ponder the conclusion. It is the moral judgment of God. It is the summing up of all these seeming contrasts of greatness and littleness. What words of mine can add anything to the keen irony of this short sentence! "It came to pass that the beggar died. The rich man also died and was buried." And this is all! All that the world worships as its idol, all the pomp and circumstance that divide the beggar at the gate and the rich at the banquet, the purple and the rags!

Come to those two chambers of death. The poor man dies; his glazed eye looks not on the straw pallet or the bare walls. The rich man

dies, and to him the stately chamber, the gilded furniture are nothing; the cold hand no longer grasps a single thing of all he called his own. The poor man dies; he is covered carelessly in his grave. The rich man dies; he is followed by the long procession. There is the solemn dirge; and the marble tells its reputable falsehood, as if the flattery that fed his life could reach the dull ear of death. But the epitaph is written: "The beggar died; the rich man died also."

Both have a few feet of earth; both lie in dumb, bare solitude; to this, the past with all its purple and its feasting is a dream; to that, the stings of hunger, the neglect of men, the weary years, are a dream.

And this is the end of life. Ah, I mistake! It is not the end. There is another end. The moral law of God reaches beyond the grave; it vindicates the good Providence; it unites the tangled skein of life; it rights the seeming wrong with an unerring equity. The life of holy suffering has its reward also: "Son, remember"—O, pause on that word, and think of all its meaning, as it brings before us that state whose bliss or pain shall be a memory of the past! "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime hast had thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; and now—"

God grant none of us may ever hear that mournful close!

CONTENTMENT.

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

PHILIPPIANS IV. 11.

What shall adjust the inequalities of wealth and poverty has been the problem of men from an early age. There have been dreams and theories. Philosophers have labored to equalize social blessings, but with all their well-meant efforts we can only confess that still there is no end of discontent.

I am inclined to think that the Apostle St. Paul, though he lived in a day which had received very little of our new light on matters of political economy and social organization, saw a little deeper than we commonly suppose into such a subject, and has given us in this one sentence a very momentous social, as well as personal, truth. If I should say that I regard this precept of a Christian contentment as the best cure for social sorrow, I shall perhaps be thought to be a visionary. But still I venture to affirm that it is a truth worth much more examination than we are wont to give it.

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." A Christian contentment, I infer, from the words of the Apostle, is one dependent, chiefly on the person and the

disposition, not on the condition. It would be very false, of course, for a Christian man to say that the world outwardly, is in its right condition, that it does not groan under many evils which ask a cure. But it is much more false to say that the greater part of its evils comes from any outward inequality. Rather, I do not hesitate to affirm that they come from within, from a false spirit. And for the proof of this, I only ask you to go out into the busy world of human energies and judge for yourselves. You will find a certain number who are in actual want of the necessities of life, but the multitude in every different condition from comfort to opulence.

Now the question presents itself: Is happiness determined, generally or chiefly, by the amount of prosperity? Are the richest happiest? Are the poorest the most wretched? Of course we except from such a reckoning the cases of genuine suffering. A starving man cannot be fed on contentment. But I speak of the bulk of society who are raised above the immediate pressure of want. No! it is plain that happiness is a relative thing. Wealth has no standard. It means a thousand to one and a million to another. What the plain farmer calls comfort is discomfort to one bred in the ease of the city. The standard changes to the same person as he becomes richer or more fashionable. The plain clothes and simple style of living that were enough for the small tradesman become

intolerable when he has grown to be a great merchant. It is amazing sometimes to reckon the host of our purely artificial wants; and yet the poorest man in modern society is as much dependent upon them as if they were absolutely essential.

But there is another consideration. Beyond mere wealth there is much that makes for happiness—outward as well as inward. I will not go so far as to say that it is all within us. Gold and silver are necessary, but surely something more. The chief sources of it are such as belong to us all. Sunshine, air, the beauty of the outward world, though we do not regard them, are a richer treasure than distinguish the prince from the peasant. Health is a blessing without which a full table and a luxurious home are no pleasures. Domestic love, friendship, and more than these, a pure heart and a good conscience are not bought and sold. They may not enter into the account of the economist, but they do into that of the Christian. We need not undervalue the benefit of a full purse—but we know it cannot purchase everything—books, but not wisdom; finery, but not refinement; dainties, but not health; a carriage, but not a sound body; rank, but not love; a chief seat in the synagogue, but not in God's communion. It is plain then to my own mind that there is in regard to sources of real, reasonable comfort much more of equality than we suppose. Every condition has a certain proportion of good and

evil. Wealth has its dangers and its troubles—not indeed suffered by all—but in the average it is as certain that there will be about so much of disease, of profligacy, of anxiety, of sorrow. We may not think it so because we know not what is good; and so, the dyspeptic may not believe the full table an evil. And it is therefore clear to us that the difference of unhappiness lies mostly in the disposition.

Look at the cases of discontent in daily life. Enter the home of the man of wealth where you expect to see happiness, you shall find the man at his sumptuous banquet, amid the circle of fashion, secretly gnawed by the worm of discontent, envious of some one higher than himself. And if again you enter the comfortable dwelling of another who belongs to what is called the middle rank, who has Agur's prayer fulfilled, "neither poverty nor riches," you meet the same spirit; his competency has not brought content; his neighbor's house or furniture is handsomer than his own; his equipage makes him sigh over the hard fortune that condemns him to walk. Fully nine-tenths of the discontent of society does not come from any real want, but from the artificial needs and the selfish uneasiness of men and women. We are not seeking after what we ought to have, and can claim the right to have—that which can make us happy—health, education, virtue—but social rank and vanity. The poor man, too often does not want the actual intelligence, the real refine-

ment of the rich; but he wants his table and his fine linen. The man of lesser means, the moment he can afford it, sometimes before, spends his income on some social finery. I am entirely convinced that the envy of the poor is as common and as great an evil as the arrogance of the rich. I grieve to say it, but I believe it one of the most prevalent distempers of our land. Every class has some one just above it. Every man treads on the heel of his superior. This is the commonly received doctrine of the day that is the chief, the worst curse, and it is from that, all are anxious to fly. I regard that feeling as one of the most deplorable and fatal to man or state. It kills all social love and sympathy. It makes society a kennel of biting and barking curs, instead of happy and helping men.

And now look at the other side, for thank God, there is another side; there are happy as well as discontented. Who are they? Are they the rich and great exclusively? Oh! no. They are those in every lot who have learned the habit of using to the best advantage the means God has given them. When I look on the sweet compensations, the hidden bounties which a Divine hand has lodged in the lowliest lot of human life I recognize a God of love. It is the best privilege of the minister of Christ that his office leads him alike to the dwellings of the lowly and the rich: and as I have mingled with the poor, the Christian poor, I have seen their

blessings as well as their privations. When I have looked on the laborer in vigorous health sitting down to eat the bread, his honest toil earned, with better appetite than the wealthy epicure at his table; when I have seen the youth strong, intelligent, taught in that training which makes character often beyond colleges and books; the daughter not ashamed to be industrious; when I have seen them growing day by day in mutual love, heirs of a wealth often not found in higher circles, a wealth of family affection, of Christian faith and duty, I have learned that the world is not so unequal as men complain.

Poverty is not an evil any more than wealth is an evil. Each is a good if used aright, each a curse if used wrongly. And this is the sum of the matter, that a man's life is chiefly what he makes it. The envious heart will always find in any station enough to call out its discontent. The cheerful, contented spirit will always find much to enjoy. It will not indeed feed the starving mouth but it will allay the artificial hunger of wealth: it will give us as much and more pleasure in our little than he who revels in superfluity, as the thrifty gardener makes more of his acre than the large farmer of his useless domain. It will extract health out of the daily food. It will make us see more beauty in the landscape than many behold in the works of costly art. It will make us sure of a happy competence here, and far more of a happy heart, and of God's blessing.

And now, you are prepared, I trust, to say with me that this Christian doctrine of a contented spirit is the profoundest wisdom for society and for ourselves. Indeed, I know no other. Suppose that every man by the grace of God had a contented disposition, there is no doubt that the sum of happiness would be infinitely increased. I do not mean by a contented spirit the ignorant and indolent temper of a savage of the Tropics who basks in the sunshine, or of a slave who is satisfied to be a well-fed animal and no more. No! the Christian spirit would not hinder any benevolent effort for the improvement of the present evils of society. Wherever there is real suffering there is a call for aid. Wherever there is an intelligent aim for knowledge, for superior excellence, it is wise to foster it. But I distinguish that spirit wholly from that feverish, restless desire of riches which inspires so many. Nor do I believe such discontent the necessary accompaniment of social action. I would labor to teach men that intelligence and virtue and piety are their better wealth. I would exorcise these demons of social envy and self-seeking. I would make the Christian laborer feel that his aim is not to get rich, but to work happily and thankfully in his lot, and find there the sources of good.

And the longer I live the more truly I feel the need and power of this Christian wisdom. In his youth every generous mind revolves painfully this problem of social inequality, and

indulges in ideal visions of the future; but as we grow older we learn more and more the futility of any ideals, and the worth of real, enduring principles. We learn that after all the world is better governed than we feared, that there is less of inequality, more of harmony in the workings of God's Providence. We learn not to feel or love or labor less for men, but to reach the heart and purify the evil there.

And this is a social, a Christian wisdom which we may make practical. We cannot change the world, but we can, by God's grace change our dispositions and habits. We may not all be rich but we may all be contented. We may so live, that, with St. Paul, in whatever state God places us we shall find sources of thanksgiving, mercies that cannot be numbered, pleasures that satisfy the mind and heart.

And it is no small part of our religion that concerns itself with this. Next to a genuine piety, nay, as the effect of a genuine piety, I regard such a spirit. It is its blessing that it can thus take away the curse of life, and in making man happy in a Christian joy, can help him to enjoy here the earnest of his happiness in Heaven. If I could make the world a great Utopia after the fashion of our dreamers, I should do little; but if I could make each a Paul in his contentment I should do more than all our socialistic fanatics with their plans of an Arcadia.

It is not an Arcadia we want but a "city of

God," a community of rich and poor, high and lowly, bound in the holy tie of a redeemed fellowship. And in that spirit let us have thankful hearts to our God today and forever. We will thank him for these numberless blessings that fall alike on good and evil—for sunshine and rain and dews, for seedtime and harvest, for food and health and reason and raiment. We will thank him, the poorest as well as the richest, for the blessings that the world neither gives nor takes away; for mercies and graces unutterable; for the hearts we love; for the peace and joy that sit at the plainest hearth, for the Christian happiness that is found in the service of the dear Saviour and in the sweet communion of His blessed grace.

FRETFULNESS.

"Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil-doers."

PSALM XXXVII. 1.

I take the word "fret" in its old Saxon meaning, and I see in this injunction of the Psalmist a theme suggested for thought which is practical. Let us try to learn the lessons which are taught, God's Holy Spirit aiding us each.

The word mentioned meant among our sturdy forefathers, to eat away slowly, bit by bit, just as the moth frays away the fabric of a robe. In the process of time it became a figurative expression to convey the idea of a self-consuming habit of the mind. It therefore is now a word with a moral sense.

The great author of "Paradise Lost" gives us its rich meaning when he speaks of the "eating cares that fret away our life."

I see a proper subject for study, first, in the peculiar nature of this disposition to fretfulness, and the manner in which it becomes our overruling master. The Psalmist shows a fine power of anatomizing character when he not only traces in a fretful man, who is always sourly complaining of the evil in the world, a lack of trust in God, but also a second bad humor akin to it, namely, envy. "Neither be thou envious against the evil-doer."

He intimates that a good man in his lament over the prosperity of the evil, is unconsciously fondling a secret jealousy, that his grumble at the evil Croesus is simply a desire for the riches he sees; it is not the voice of contentment, which perceives the hollowness of all ill-gotten gain and finds comfort in the enjoyment of its own real wealth.

We learn that this vice may grow up unthinkingly in the heart of a Christian and blight his real religion. We easily discern the vices that manifest themselves in some startling flash of passion or wrong-doing; but we may clasp this disposition to the very bosom without dreaming of its wrong.

How many a man has looked out on the world from the midst of his own morbid, distorted fancies, so that he has lost all healthy sympathies and become the prey of his self-consuming feeling. Who is there here, who has not experienced in his own intercourses in life the marvelous power of imagination over the reality of things? Who has not seen it in the sad or grotesque cases of monomania? A man can imagine himself a beggar though a millionaire, and it is a solemn, real fact to him. Another is certain that the seeds of a deadly disease have become rooted in his frame, and he broods over the varied symptoms until at last he becomes a victim of that very malady.

But the secret lurks in the nature of our mental and moral framework. All we see or

hear takes its tone from the condition of our eyes and ears, just as to the jaundiced sight, everything looks saffron. Our disposition thus often determines our view of life. While we are, therefore, dependent to some degree on the outward lot of wealth or poverty, social comfort or discomfort, yet it is just as true that we are dependent on our inward state of feeling.

In fact, I see here a proof of the watchful love of a kind Providence. He leaves our happiness so much in our own keeping. You see the peaceful heart where there is but the meagre income, "the dinner of herbs" instead of the "stalled ox"; and on the other hand too often the unhappy spirit with the possession of a fortune.

Thus the cause of this distemper of a fretful spirit is plain. It is a spirit of discontent, of anxiety or fear. But it is really at the root selfish. It is the selfish feeling that makes a man dwell in his unreal world of suspicion and doubt.

It seems to me capable of becoming a most despotic habit, and so one of the most incurable and tormenting of vices to our own peace, and to the comfort of our friends.

An angry temper is a bad disposition, but it is often a storm that spends itself in its own gusts, and leaves behind a clearer sunshine. A stern temper is most trying, but we learn to bear with it if there be a manly, generous strength under the surface. But the fretful spirit is the insidious, searching, wearing, continuous wind of

March, always attended by a sullen sky, and chilling the joints and marrow; that continual dropping of a rainy day, whereof Solomon speaks, as though he had a trial of it in his own household, which soaks at last into the fibre of body and soul.

There is no cure for it when it has fastened on us as a habit. You can rebuke an angry man, and he is penitent as he thinks of his breach of good manners, but this spirit we may nurse and cultivate without the least suspicion that we are transgressors. Nay, we may even think ourselves the most persecuted of men, while we are coolly gnawing at the peace of all around us. Nothing so readily develops into a settled disease. We brood over our selfish trials, and constantly discover ever-recurring fuel for our flaming complaint. We become like the invalid who pets his maladies, talks of naught else to his visitors, and thinks himself wretched if he cannot see all others so.

This is without exaggeration the chronic root of discord in households. There are men and women who have fine reputations for goodness among men, who never commit a sin against the Decalogue, who never quarrel, or bear false witness, or steal, and yet they possess the exquisite faculty of keeping a whole household on the rack every day of the year.

Life is with them a quiet, pitiless fretting. Each most trivial accident vexes them; each unavoidable mistake of servant or child rouses

to severe criticism; the upsetting of a whim is a whet to ill-temper; a day's ill success is avenged by a sullen face; an attack of the nerves throws the family into convulsions.

Ah! how much of the sound joy of homes is frittered away by these men and women who are forever droning out their solemn lamentations! What tenfold burdens we make of the cares which would be a cheery duty if we thought more of others and less of our imaginary woes! What hourly blessings from God we forget in our selfish life!

Look at the manifestations of the same unlovely temper in society. The fretful man, be his calling or his rank highest or lowliest, carries with him the corrosive acid that eats the beauty out of every gift of God. Is he rich? He is always tormented by his cares, annoyed by a tenant, by a trivial loss in business, by some extra risk he has been compelled to take. Is he in competent circumstances? Ah! some petty difficulty sours him. He is never satisfied with a solid comfort that lies right under his hand. Is he in pleasant social position? Then there is some neighbor to grumble about, some little accident that tries his temper.

If he travel abroad he sees no beauty in the grandeurs of Switzerland, or the classic realms of Greece or Palestine. The discomforts of the journey, the unpleasant encounters with fellow-travelers, the mistakes of one and another employee, these are forever the subject of his

talk and his lament. No flower whence he does not distil poison. He is constantly mourning over the decay of the great men and the good morals of his childhood, as he talks on politics or philanthrophy. He is certain that the world is on the down grade to ruin.

It is strange how this distemper grows by what it feeds upon. Think of how large a portion of the evils of life we ourselves have created, what mountains we rear out of molehills! "He that regardeth the clouds shall not sow." There are miserable men who grow at last to lose all faith and hope in anything; sour cynics whose only happiness in the end is in making themselves and others bountifully unhappy.

But the mischievous influence of this fretful spirit is more conspicuous in its relation to our views of the Christian life. "Fret not thyself because of the ungodly," is the injunction of the Psalmist. It is the riddle for every good man as he looks abroad on the world, why there are so many seeming triumphs of injustice, why there are so many evil who prosper, so many holy who suffer, why truth is so much in eclipse, why error so often flaunts with dazzling splendor unrebuked.

As he views it all, too often the misgiving, the doubt, will come. But this is the very purpose of this Christian faith of ours, to aid us to grapple with and conquer this native fearfulness.

How many, however, consider it a token of a ripe religious zeal when they cherish this gloomiest temper of discontent at the ways of Providence. It is a painful sight to behold Christian men—and how frequently is it the case!—who profess to believe in a divine truth, in the promise of the future, yet always looking on the wrong side of life, lamenting in words of gall the vices of the day, and conjuring up the most fanciful fears.

What hosts of these solemn critics and doubters the world produces! One tells you that the skepticism of the age is rushing on like a mountain torrent, and that the Bible is to be ground to powder. Another is tormented by the inroads of Popery, and utterly despairs of Protestant faith. You meet one who has brooded over his inward feelings until the world seems hung in black; and another is as feverish and depressed regarding his Christian work as if there were no grace of God. But let such understand that they are fostering not piety at all but their own diseased, selfish feeling. This sour distrust is no more true religion than a sputtering rush candle is the great sun.

God has not given us our life, to squander it on our weak humors. It is not wise to hide the evils, nor does it change the gray landscape to look at it through a Claude Lorraine mirror, but it is surely a folly to increase the evils fourfold by our diseased, fretful fancies. Nor does it aid our effort to cure them.

I think we may righteously conclude that more than half the errors of religion, the silly superstitions, the morbid doubts, are from this fretful and faithless temper. Many a complaining man is wasting his heart in slothful fear. Many are afraid to trust the truth in God's hands, and are anxious to protect it against the floods by their poor earthen dykes—articles there, and ritual here, and new Church dogma in another place. We forget that Providence has borne with the sin and the discord, and has led the cause of His religion safely through a Red Sea and a dry Sahara, and that we can yet safely leave it with Him.

And now in closing, a few words regarding the cure for this temper. I know nothing better than the direction of this same Psalm, "Hold thee still in the Lord, and abide patiently." This habit of a trusting, abiding faith in God, this is the need.

I do not mean that abstract sentiment we love to talk of, but that only real faith which lives in the fact of such a wise, good Providence. If we soberly believe in such a Being, we shall know that it is no slight vice we feed when we thus indulge in this selfish distrust. It may be difficult to heal the folly, but we shall make it a serious discipline.

And if we have thus learned to look on life, not through our diseased fancies but as the scene of our cheerful duty, then we shall learn that such a spirit is sober sense as well as religious

feeling. Our real experience will have taught us that we have indulged the gross absurdity of cheating ourselves of real happiness by our imaginary folly. We have looked, as the astronomer did, at a fly in our object glass, and thought it a meteor in the heavens. We have made our cares harder and lost sight of our mercies. We have brooded over our fears and suffered, yet we have lived to find that a kind Father has done better for us than we deserved; and we can look back with shame on our complaints.

It is wise for us thus to learn that life is only happy when we have gained this unselfish heart. I asked an old man of eighty, who was fresher than many at middle age, the secret of his health; and he answered, "I have had two rules in life, one to imagine no trouble, and another to look on the cheerful side of every trial when God sends it."

That is the best medicine of the heart. I would we might all recognize it more as part of our essential piety. To gain this freedon from a morbid, self-consuming spirit, to possess this simple, implicit, changeless trust in God, this would be to reach a religion with solid reality in it. I know we can not so rise above nature as to be always calm, nor would I wish a stoic indifference. But it would be a blessing if we could reach the Apostolic mind that can say, "none of these things move me"; and so be assured of the goodness of God as to fear no evil, save of a heart that doubts Him. Ever in

the happy condition of a peaceful Paul, in dark days or bright, among evil or good, with trial or delight, ready to confess always till death:—"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

COMPASSION.

"He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."

PSALM CIII. 14.

We take up the Old Testament and while often we find threatenings and penalties abounding, yet we meet frequently a voice and deed of tenderness. We learn that the God whose law seems to speak so often of terrors, and to wake the fear of men, is a gentle Father who in pity and love guides and helps and blesses his poor, weak, wayward children.

In the text, and in this 103rd Psalm, this fact is peculiarly manifest. It whispers to our trembling hearts with a sweetness no less merciful and loving than does the voice of Jesus Himself in the allegory of a prodigal son, a good Shepherd, or a lost sheep.

It tells us "the Lord is full of compassion, and mercy, long-suffering and of great goodness. Yea, like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him. He knoweth our frame."

The chapter sparkles with proclamations of the divine pity. How touchingly is it illustrated by the poet. God is as a pitying Father. How the illustration speaks to a parent's heart, which knows the love for its child. What can recall more touchingly the feeling you have

toward the weak beings, flesh of your flesh, in the fresh stage of infancy and youth. It is all said in that one word, *pity*.

You pass by the little faults, the childish waywardnesses, the gusts and storms that cloud the April sky of life, the rash humors, the easily besetting sins: and while we seek by firm discipline to educate the manhood and womanhood, we "remember their frame." And thus your own affection will teach you what is the heart of God toward His children; how much greater the pity, the patience, the long-suffering toward us, who are at best but children of threescore and ten.

"He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." Let us consider some of the suggestions which naturally arise out of the text.

Blessed Spirit of God, we beseech Thee, aid this effort to teach Thy truth.

We will be led to consider the judgment of the all-wise God regarding our human life. I cannot feel that is a true portrait of the Almighty which pictures Him as a foolish parent, given to weak indulgence, forgetting a wise discipline of the household: one who leaves His children to their excesses and permits them to scorn His just authority.

He has given us laws of life which seem pitiless in their execution. Disease does not spare the guilty, but writes shame and impotence upon the misused frame. Almost every

wrong reaps its certain punishment. Any notion of a divine love which ignores the principle of law in its government, either in this world or the next is a falsehood.

Yet we must never put in the place of this Fatherly law, this justice blended with love, that view of God's character which has been so much held by some classes of Christians. I see often in the pictures of my Father in Heaven which these sketch, the severe countenance of a rigid taskmaster, the semblance of that hard-hearted man the Lord displayed in the parable, who had no pity on his poor debtor.

I see no smile of a divine love, no tender yearnings of the God-heart which came to soothe and seek and save. How frequently has His law been so presented to men that they only see in it fierce judgment, cold statute, and remorseless punishment. No word of loving-kindness, no voice of pitying mercy for frail, trembling, weeping sinners. Even the precious atonement of Jesus loses its meaning, its beauty, because it is no gift of a Father's love, but a mere appeasing of His severe anger.

I have read that story of Jonathan Edwards, the severe teacher of this stern theology, how he drew one of his fearful pictures of the lost, hanging by a spider's web over the flames, and while the people held their breath a minister behind him grasped his sleeve in a very convulsion of terror and cried: "Is He not a God, too, of mercy?"

Yet this same Edwards wrote a book on the "Affections"; and another on the "Will," proving that no man had more power over his own desires than an iron filing to resist the magnet.

This stern theology is not in harmony with the spirit of the piety which Jesus taught; when the child is taught to look on God as if He were an omniscient detective who pries into every thought and passing mood. Our fear of God must be the fear of sin against His love.

It is not a sound Christian piety which makes us brood over our sins; it will transform us rather into wrestling with them, and we shall learn that even our weak struggles are aided by His grace.

And, too, we shall learn that our Father above is a Father indeed; not one who judges with harshness, but who treats us as does a wise parent, in a discipline which is guided by love; who so tempers even the evils of life that they may be sources of growth, who never refuses even a prodigal that remembers his Father's house.

And this kindly view of God's fatherly pity is based on the most real view of life. We are at best capable of a finite wisdom or holiness, and as our nature and lot, so the rule of judgment and recompense. And when in that light we consider it, it is indeed a most needful lesson.

We know the varied effect of our nature, our physical and mental constitution, on our life. What a difference it makes whether we are born

with one temperament or another; what dispositions we have taken from father or mother; what seeds of special weakness lie in us! What dependence there is in our whole social action on the cheerful or melancholic humor of the man! What power the state of the body has over the mind! A pain of the nerves deranges the thought, and a dyspepsia casts a gloom over one's social mood, and even affects the devotion.

It is far easier when I am in perfect health to bear the trials of life, to look kindly on my fellow-men, and to do my best and noblest. At times it gives us a natural despair.

It is far harder for some to wrestle with their hindrances of action and of lot than others. Yet what then? Are we bondslaves of fate? No! this is our trial. None is entirely exempt. But because the treasure is in an earthen vessel it is no less a treasure.

God has thus created us to reach our wisdom by effort, and our holiness by patient toil. It is our comfort to know that if we be not angels, but a little lower, yet we have a human life to live here where we are placed by our Maker, and a divine purpose to fulfill in it. Nay, more, we have the promise of His love to aid our infirmities, and the assurance of His paternal kindness.

"To each according to his ability." This is His law. He does not ask of the humble flower the branching majesty of the oak. The asteroid is not expected to describe the orbit of Jupiter,

nor the distant nebulae to light the earth with the splendor of the sun.

So, too, He will not hold the poor savage responsible for the knowledge he has not; nor will the unhappy soul who is born in ignorance or who wrestles with hardships be made accountable for more than he deserves. He assigns each of us his post, his work, and He asks no more than our true endeavor to use aright our powers and our opportunities.

Such is the view of life that must and ought to affect our religious view also. We may draw from it a few kindly lessons. It gives us in the first place, the sense of the worth of our imperfect work. There is no reckless and epicurean indifference in such a sentiment. We are not taught that because we are so frail, so tempted, we may yield our members to the strain, do the wrong and enjoy our selfish ease.

Nay! it is "pity," to use the Psalmist's words, "for those who fear Him." We must do battle with our weaknesses. We must know that life is meant for conflict.

"I came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword." A sword to cut down and slay wrong.

We must know that no holiness we possess comes except through the dark contests, the hand to hand warfare of our struggling life with the soul's foes. But it is a thought which takes away all despair, all melancholy, for those who are toiling amid the real infirmities of the flesh. Yes, it is the very doctrine of the Gospel that

we are accepted of the grace of God in spite of our short-comings.

We look back on the years that are flown so fast away; we remember the lofty plans of youth, the pure though sanguine hope with which we welcomed the coming of manhood; we remember how we have met with failure in so much, how large a portion of our working years thus far have been flung away on fruitless projects or unwise methods, what struggles of our pride and waywardness against Providence, what a trivial result, what a thin outcome after all the bright promises of the past!

We see the fig-tree standing in the orchard full of green foliage, but alas! it is almost like that Jesus saw on the highway, yielding "nothing but leaves." Yet thanks be to God, we may know that as there is some fruit it is not in vain.

There is not in the race of men one who reads his own biography back through the years, who has not chapters in it like ours. Yea! even the wisest and the holiest at the close can only exclaim "we are but unprofitable servants."

And if our harvest be meagre and poor we know it is a loving Father "who remembers our frame." It is a strange fact of life that when one of us has become an invalid he surely discovers that every other man has some complaint, some settled malady which he has been all along hiding from the world.

And so each has some mental or moral

infirmity which he has struggled with, even the few who have seemed to us so perfect, so above the level of mankind. It may seem a selfish comfort to think of; yet after all, it is not the pleasure we feel in others' suffering, but to know that we are not alone; we have only our share of this weak humanity.

"He remembers our frame." Our God is more pitying than our fellow-men; and we may find in Him when we have no charity from others, our Divine Comforter. There is no struggle we have had He does not know; no poor endeavor He does not accept; no contrite sigh, no silent tear, no breath of a petition for help or mercy He does not count.

And if after the years of life we can come to Him in an honest heart, and lay at His feet the offering of our labor, it is all He asks of us.

Yes, it is the best—nay, the only true happiness of a Christian man when he has learned that it is not the great results of his years, but the sincere aim, the holy, earnest endeavor, which our Father accepts. It is not, as we near the end of our years, the poor plaudits of men, the fulsome eulogies of our virtues, that can cheat us, if we have known ourselves. It is that simple epitaph Howard left to be written on his grave, that we shall covet: "Not I, but Christ."

If I have gained some little truth that makes me holier; if I have done some little work to help others in the dark, toward God's light; if I have given my poor life for a true and sacred

end; I may resign it with a cheerful will to Him. And I know He will receive it, and crown it, though all weak, with His holy blessing.

We learn too, from this truth, what should be our judgments of our fellow-men. If we believe in such a pitiful God, if we require that grace toward us, it is surely no virtue in us, to learn to look with somewhat more of human feeling on the faults of others. I am sure it is the best evidence that we have grown in the sweet piety of Christ's Gospel, in proportion as the sense of our own weakness, our own temptations, our own short-comings, has enabled us to grow in charity, charity for our brother's infirmities, sins, vices even.

We shall not lose our keen scrutiny of sin, our purity of social virtue, our reverence of sacred law, if we carry this maxim always into our judgment. We shall only gain the power in knowledge of self, to understand the same human nature wherever it is. We shall only acquire the blessed power to aid them as we want God's aid. In all the thousand instances of daily life, amid the poor, the heavy-laden, with sorer burdens than our own, the doubtful, struggling for the light of truth, the young cast on the whirlpool of the world, the tempted and the fallen, we shall remember that "they are dust."

Ah, yes! I see so many broken lives that might have been my own. I see so many fallen who are yet better in their character than I, had

I been placed in the same temptation. I see so many noble lives, lives of promise, that have perished. Yet over their dust I can only stand in pity, not in judgment, and leave them in His hand whose pity I need so often for my own infirmities. Might we all have more of this spirit of our Master.

And so, as the years pass, our record will be a more loving faith in God and Christ, in the power of that Gospel to save men from sin and wretchedness. It will be not a scorn of mankind, not a despairing view of the world, but a sweeter trust that we are children of our Father, and our human life, with all its waywardness and wandering, is the education for a life where this frail dust shall put on its heavenly manhood.

Giver of life, accept us, Thy children, in Thy great pity. Give us courage to toil, and faith to quicken us day by day; and after labor Thy holy rest.

INDECISION.

"And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight."

St. John XIX. 39.

Nicodemus is no solitary character. He is a native of all ages. He has a side where the sunshine plays. There is also a phase of his character which lies in dark shadow. I would examine the portrait that he presents and draw lessons from it.

He was clearly a man of honest convictions. He was tolerant, judicious, kind. But he was a member of the great Sanhedrim. It would not, therefore, be dignified, not consistent with his high office to openly take the side of the new teacher. He had not courage to brave the sneer of his fellow-Pharisee. The new religion was not reputable enough for the august senators of Judea to accept. It was well enough for fishermen, but "have any of the Scribes or Pharisees believed on His name?" is their query.

It is plain from the conversation of that night when he sought Jesus that he recognized in the Man of Galilee one sent from God. He was earnest in seeking for light. His was not an idle curiosity. We must not treat his name as a synonym for mere cowardice or double-dealing

in design. But in that little fact stated by St. John we see, traced boldly, the real man. Had Christ's religion been popular in high society; had the elite of Judea accepted it, he, too, would have gladly paid his homage at His feet. But it was too much for a Master in Israel to wait on the teaching of a Galilee peasant and take his place among sinners and tax-gatherers and boatmen. And so he came by night and listened and went his way. This, it seems to me, is the distinctive color, the key-note of the character. The narrative confirms it. Once again he appears before the crucifixion of the Saviour. It is when the Council sits to plot the murder of the Son of God. St. John's Gospel gives us his speech: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?" It shows us the tone of the man—thoughtful, forbearing, desirous of righteous equity, even of mercy. But he dare not frankly confess his half-belief. He has not the courage to say to those angry men, "I know He is a teacher sent from God," what he had said to Jesus himself secretly, and by night. He would serve the two masters. He would be the double-dealer who is the friend of the murderous Pharisees and the friend of the meek and innocent Son of God at the same time. It was a weakness and a cowardice which could not sacrifice the one for the other. Like all such compromises, it was a failure. And the man had not the love of either, but only earned the mistrust and the

contempt of both. At that Council he suggests only caution, a fair hearing. But his weak, timid remonstrance is only like a reed facing the rush of a swollen torrent, like a trim yacht—fit only for summer seas—riding recklessly out into the teeth of the wild typhoon. All it calls forth is the fierce cry, "Art thou also of Galilee?" and the frightened man is silenced, and that silence is guilt: it was a submission to the act of murder by which the Son of the great God was slain. The want of resolution, the poor amiability which could not thunder its protests against that wrong in the Senate-chamber of Israel is as gigantic a wickedness in the eyes of high Heaven as their voices were who on the day of the Calvary tragedy cried: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" The voice that was not brave enough to be heard when by decision it might have averted a crime was doubly guilty, because it omitted to help when it might save.

We can fancy the man as he strolls sadly homeward, saying with himself: "Alas! I am powerless. I shall only destroy this poor victim and myself if I speak. I must let matters take their course. Perhaps it will all work out rightly at last." And so he leaves the awful crime to these fiends who have decision and are in earnest. So, too, he dismisses his own part in the murder with a quiet conscience.

Thus many a man without nerve, of faint courage, by silence helps on a crime and lays the flattering unction to his soul that he could

not help it, that he stands guiltless. But the severe searchings of the last judgment will show his shame and his crime; and his weak indecision shall win for him only the wrath of an outraged God.

Here, then, we have the character. It is not an uncommon one. In it our Evangelist has sketched a goodly number of later as well as earlier Masters in Israel. As I look on the world I see the open champions of Christ on the one hand, and on the other, the open enemies flatly denying His truth and resolved on attack. But between the two I see a host, neither of one rank nor the other, men by no means unbelievers, men with a kindly feeling toward the faith who keep a formal connection with it, speak respectfully of it, attend its worship, talk well of its polity and its watchwords and its costumes, but they cherish it as a hid treasure, they cannot afford to avow it, and so they *come by night.*

It is a peculiar tendency of this particular age, with its unsettled opinion, to create such a character. A thorough Christianity is not the fashion; and many think it a doubtful cause which it is wisest not to espouse too firmly or to follow too far. Science has not committed itself to it fully. Polite society finds its more rigid precepts too inconvenient; and so these Nicodemuses flatter it and honor it, but they give it a very cold welcome to their hearts.

Let us look at some of the changing hues of this undecided character. Here is one, a culti-

vated man who is conversant with the floating ideas that pass for philosophy and wisdom; yet at heart he has a consciousness of the Christian truth. He reads of Jesus and that Saviour awes and attracts him. Yet he dare not freely confess his feeling; he may be laughed at by his witty friends for his superstition, for his credulity. Their sneers awe him into a silence regarding his holy Saviour. And so he remains, tossing his heart and his head about, like a tennis-ball; reading Colenso today and St. Paul tomorrow, Voltaire one month and Butler's "Lives of the Saints" the next, and never reaching any steady belief. If you ask him, he will say it is not want of courage, but sincere hesitation about truth. But, alas! the moral weakness is too plain. Were he in earnest he would hunger and thirst, he would yearn and agonize with groanings unutterable after a solid conviction, a steady, satisfying faith. But his easy, comfortable indifference is the proof that there is no genuine longing for truth.

Another is a man of upright character with a devout disposition, who knows his Christian duty and acknowledges it, but he can never be persuaded to assume the open vows of the Christian. What is the secret? He will tell you that he fears so solemn a responsibility. But there is another subtle fear which he hardly knows himself. He moves in a circle where men look on a Christian believer as a dull or narrow devotee. It may be his business competitors,

his personal friends, the members of his lodge; and their jest or sneer is insensibly working on his holier desires. It is almost impossible, it is intense pain to brave such opposition. Yes! it is often easier to meet a bullet than the sharp innuendo, the cold manner of men and women who constitute what is called society, who are our familiars and our daily companions. Many a slave of the world has been frightened out of his best convictions by those whose good or evil opinion was not worth his contempt. There are more examples of such a character. They are too many. We could only recall them with pangs of sorrow. The cause of Christian truth has suffered more often by the silence and consequent betrayal of its friends than by the worst malice of its enemies. It is not the meeting with the foe on the battle-field we have most to fear. It is the poor diplomacies of our smooth Nicodemuses, the amiable, weak men of compromise who compliment truth by night and turn their back upon it in the daytime, the men who will wrap the body in fair linen and perfume it with the fragrant spices after they have stabbed it in the dark, the men who with a subtle trickery and a smooth-tongued sophistry on the day after the battle mould a dishonest and ignoble and unstable truce.

I will dwell no longer on the character. I turn now to its fruits. Where can I show you better than in the life of this Master in Israel! Let us follow the narrative. We read no more

of him until after the death of the Saviour. Then we hear of him as one who with Joseph of Arimathaea, another secret Christian and Jewish senator, comes by night and embalms the body of the crucified Jesus. The silence of the history and the half-conscious sarcasm of St. John, who in speaking of him always describes him as "the same who came by night," are sad witnesses that this is all that can be known of his connection with the Christian cause. There is a legend that he became an open convert, was driven by the Jews from the Sanhedrim, stripped of rank and wealth, and that Gamaliel, his kinsman, buried him by the side of the martyred Stephen. There is, too, at old Glastonbury, in England, a hoary, age-worn ruin, full of richest carving in stone, used before vandal hands touched it as a chapel for the glory of Almighty God. This, tradition says, was the work of his companion, Joseph of Arimathaea. But we can only fear that of both these stealthy, nocturnal Christians these are but monkish legends that have no foundation in fact.

Here then is the whole record of Nicodemus; a secret visit to Christ, and a timid remonstrance at his arraignment, and a stealthy burial! He had remained a secret disciple while all those august scenes had been passing along the highway of history, while the Son of God was wandering homeless, with His meagre retinue of poverty-stricken men; while the plots of Pharisees and a Pilate were ripening; while the

awful tragedy of a Calvary was reaching its climax; he, the shrewd and sagacious senator had sat silent in council, and now he creeps again by night to show his faith by winding in perfumes the dead body of Him he had not dared defend when alive.

I know not how such a character appears to you. He may have been a guileless and inoffensive person, but I cannot quite repress a feeling of sad pity, and a stronger feeling of utter contempt.

I look at this learned, this refined, this high-born Master in Israel, non-committal, halting, diplomatic, cowardly, and then I turn to those modest, loyal fishermen, who dared follow their Master by day as well as by night, who without learning or rank fought for Him in the open field and won the victory.

What could possibly have been the fate of Christianity if it had been laid in the hands of a Nicodemus? It could only have received a secret burial, inevitably, by night, without mourners, with no possible chance of a resurrection.

What a biography is here then, my brethren, for a Christian believer! And what a lesson for our own time when we are called to duties as pressing, to a choice as decisive!

The early day of the Gospel is indeed past, yet it remains and must remain always a cause that has its crises, its times for decision and action on the part of all its professors. Read

here the history of thousands, like this Jewish Master, wise in their generation, reputable, amiable and useless. They are like the ornaments in architecture, like the figurehead at a ship's prow, but empty decorations, rich indeed but vain. What have such silent, nocturnal followers done for the spread or the defence of Christian truth? Nothing. Great battles for the faith are waging, but these stand neutral. Years have swept on and the events of God's kingdom have marched forward in their vast orbit, but these have kept aloof, hiding their convictions, escaping every trial, only seeking to secure their own petty salvation (failing probably in that) and all to grow grey in a slothful innocuous, colorless existence. Is this the pattern of a Christian disciple? No. Give me the man who is an open enemy or an open follower, one who sails under my own or my foe's flag, not the neutral who is enemy or friend to either as convenience dictates, or interest demands, or caprice tempts. But for such a halter between two opinions, such a life of non-committal, such a worshipper who bows to God today, and tomorrow in the house of Rimmon, such a Christian by night, I say of him as the poet did of the timorous ghosts he saw shivering on the coast of the underworld:

> "Hateful to God and to the foes of God
> Regard them and pass by."

If we have principles worthy of the name, let us maintain them. Let us fight always with

the weapons of our Master, with calm argument, with a hearty charity. An earnest falsehood will do more than a coward truth. It is a day that specially demands this manly, courageous above-board Christianity. It is a day when truth and falsehood, Israel and the Philistines are set in battle array, army against army.

Make your decision concerning them, my brother, with clear, calm judgment. Be fully persuaded what is faith and what is superstition; what is for Christ and what is against. There is a faith. There is a Jesus. They are not dreams, not melting clouds, not poetic myths, not madmen's haunting spectres. They are realities. They are changeless. They are eternal. Whatever the changes and chances that time shall decree, these will stand unaltered while ages come and go. With them is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Thus convinced my brother, as to what is faith and what is superstition, as to what is Christ and what is against Him, resolve to stand, to stand steadfast. Labor, live, surrender mind, heart, strength, will, for your Master. Let Him be all in all. Let Him be king on the throne of the heart. "If Baal be God, follow him, but if the Lord be God, follow Him."

SERVICE TO GOD.

"I have a message from God unto thee."

JUDGES III. 20.

I would accommodate an ancient speech, out of a dim past, to my discourse. It looms up from a tragedy. The message was Ehud's two-edged dagger. The tragedy was despotic Eglon's assassination. The story tells of wild life and fierce passions, and the hand red with blood.

My text—not through its context, but in its own simple terms—suggests my theme. Religion—its call, responsibility, duty, privilege. In a nutshell I mean Service to God.

It has its many-hued elements—prayer, praise, adoration, thanksgiving to Him, for mercy, for guidance, for care, for grace, for love. These are vital factors in the life of any, who is not an ingrate. The Father asks them, rightly of His children, you and me. Piety it is, religion it is, spiritual life it is.

But much is said of my obligation to my brother in these days, by the pulpit and by the press. Yes! but there is an obligation to Him who gave me my brother—his Father and mine—God. That I must not omit, ignore, reject. I would be only incomplete, as a man—in my relations as a man—if I did. And what I give or do for my brother is not mine, but His who bestowed the gift for him and for me. It is

privilege to give. It means inter-relation beyond the common. I may give to my brother—it may be of my substance—or, it may be in the form of the Gospel to the heathen in lands afar. But what I give to him after all, is not that of which I am proprietor, whether it be spiritual privilege, or material substance. It came to me from above. I am only a disbursing agent for another. I am but God's Almoner. That helps my brother; but, I have need to be concerned respecting the result to me, the merit or the demerit of my ostensible gift. It may be corrupt. It may have come unrighteously. It may have been without heart, and so unsanctified in His eyes. If so, it may be worthless, so far as any benefit to me, or reward for it, is concerned. If I have given in condescension, or that I may be rid of importunity, or that I may acquire a generous name, or that I may benefit my business, or that I may escape the distressing sight of squalor or suffering, then the accounting day will show no credit for my action. It was selfish. It was tainted money, or tainted service. The soul of it was dead.

Or, if I would demonstrate my sense of stewardship by my money gifts to missions or to poverty and trust to that charity to cover my neglects of God, neglects of worship, neglects of penitences for sin, neglects of loyal service to Jesus in His House, at His Altar, out in His world—then I am a mistaken man.

True Charity—the Charity which is not

bald almsgiving, but almsgiving embroidered all over with love, almsgiving where the dye of sympathy penetrated to the reverse side of the tapestry—*that* can cover the multitude of sins. But this even may be honeycombed with flaw, with rust, with rot, with canker, so that it have little hope of acceptance with God. It has, mayhap, forgotten Him. It has not poured out gratitude to Him who gave, for the power and the privilege He gave me, to give. There is a mountain fountain, bubbling up near the clouds in Scotland: "Drink and bless the Giver" is an injunction carved on the rock-lip of the well. That humane sculptor in the wilderness felt that he and all who drank of that refreshing rill owed immediate debt to the Father above.

I met a man of Wall Street, grown rich by its plans and trades. He was always generous and gave large alms to need. I rejoiced with him on rich results flowing out of his munificent benevolences. He said: "Give me no credit for all this. My temperament is the cause. It is only heredity. I was born with the spirit of pity for suffering or sorrow. I give from impulse. I give because I like to." That man knew himself. He had made self-search. He found he was lacking as a true almoner of his Master. In time he found Jesus—at the Font and at the Altar. Thenceforth, he was the lowly trustee, dispensing lovingly of bounty coming from the Giver of all good things to his brother-man. He gave in His Name. He gave because he

loved Him. He gave to honor and to please Him. So it became Charity—that which shall bear the test of the final day.

And now I turn to the purpose of this discourse, the true view-point—the characteristic of right religion.

The preaching of the time and the course of living among Christian professors, is based largely upon what is called the "Social Gospel." We hear much touching the "brotherhood of man," touching humanitarianism; but do you realize that, with many, spiritual culture is eclipsed thereby? The saving of one's soul is not at all popular now as the theme of the preacher. Sermons discuss social problems, new ethical systems and psychological riddles and civic perplexities and fresh spiritual cults and modern theories of life and God and duty, and science's attacks, and new thought and the like. And alas! too often the people love to have it so. These are solemn and sacred problems relating to my brother's weal, indeed. But I cannot find in the New Testament that this was how the world was "turned upside down," and the Caesars shaken from their tottering thrones. I do not find that Christian history exhibits the martyrs of the arena and the stake, as trusting to social service alone, and to modern humanitarianism to save their souls. Is it not my sacred work to build a throne in my heart for my crucified Redeemer? Is not the grand morality a love of Him? Is it not my urgent task to lift to

His brow the chaplet of my humble and adoring homage? Is not much social preaching and social service in the churches simply an effort to whitewash the walls while the house is burning? Or to repair the bedstead while the patient is dying through need of the physician's care? Man needs the Father. Man wants Jesus truly to live, rightly to die. I will stretch out my hand to my needing brother indeed, but I must, too, clasp the pierced hand of the Cross for my own greater need. I am pointing you to your Saviour today, not to your generous deeds, to your missionary enthusiasm. In Him, not in these, is eternal salvation. To Him give heart, work, worship, life. God and I must not be apart. I only do my brother rightful service, as I, His child, try to do my Father's will.

Again, can missionary zeal and interest be overdone? It may become a self-deceiving fad. It may become an irreligious religion. If it be made a substitute for other factors in the divine life, then it thrusts a stiletto through the very heart of my piety. I have crowned man and dethroned Jesus. If my sacraments are ignored and my sanctuary confessions and thanksgivings forsaken because I pay for my seat at the missionary banquet with its sparkling jests and give my offering for the missionary work, then my religion is vain. It is empty service in God's eyes. Your dinner or your dollar is not alternative for the worship and the obedience of your redeeming Saviour. You may be boomed by

the haranguing missionary orator for your generous gifts, but there is the repudiating of allegiance to the King. You are a defaulter.

To conclude, I am exhibiting to your view today an old-fashioned, commonplace picture of piety. Perhaps it seems to you threadbare or faded or somewhat invertebrate for this sturdy generation. Perhaps you deem it fitting for mediaeval life and the dim, religious light filtering through the figured glass of old cathedrals, and not adapted to the blaze of our electric day. I grant you it is not "new thought," nor free thought, nor Swedenborgianism, nor Christian Science, nor scientific doubt, nor psychotherapy, —but your fathers believed in and lived in it, and died in its hope and reality. In your babyhood's parish church its plain, simple and pure verities sweetened the community, controlled its morals, enriched and made honorable its business life, kept the unbroken home and strengthened the marriage vow, day by day. Are you ashamed of it? Is it a straight-jacket for your larger wisdom—for the richer vision, of which so many speak, unctuously, in this age? Is it to you an irridescent dream of a by-gone epoch or of a less enlightened generation? There are many who have found it strong as ever; not a nerve has been enfeebled. Electric lights have not outblazed the sun. Freethought has not outthought the Saviour. Radium has not quenched the Spirit of God. Protoplasm has not exploded the Atonement. Science has not

hewn down the Cross. There is the light of the world still. There is hope still. There is the Bible still. There is Heaven still. There is Jesus still.

COURAGE.

"So did not I."

NEHEMIAH V. 15.

Amid the diplomacies and the schemes which cross and recross the pages of history, amid the ambitions and deceits of courtiers, conquerors and sovereigns that flash on its records, it is refreshing now and then to see the face of an honest, righteous man. We have the portrait of such an one in the Nehemiah who speaks with the words of the text. He was, in a dark day of its history, the rebuilder and the reformer of Jerusalem. He stands forth in the gallery of Holy Scripture characters as does the statue of Latimer or Clarkson in the line of illustrious worthies which flank the entrance to the British Parliament.

Nehemiah was a man courageous enough, at the moment of crisis, at the point of extremest peril to self, then to say *No.* That was the brave trait that marked the man, that was the element in his biography which stamped him for all time a hero. When he left the capital of Persia and bade farewell to that Oriental Court, he went down to Jerusalem resolved to do something to relieve his suffering fellow-countrymen who were then abiding there. The noble old city was in ruins. The Jews who had returned thither from Babylon were oppressed and plundered. Similar abuses had crept in to those

which have disgraced many of our modern city governments. Nehemiah grasps evils with a ruthless hand, resolved to strangle them, resolved that there shall be reform.

First, he calls the people with a ringing demand to "rise up and build the walls" which were overturned. Then he sweeps away the unjust taxes, the lucrative sinecures, the greedy officials that robbed the people. The desecrations of the Sabbath and the dishonors shown to the Temple he rebukes. All the corruptions that ever must grow up in godless days when unclean men are the heads of party in the state, had appeared in the midst of the returned Jews in Jerusalem. Nehemiah found all this. Precedent would have justified him in making his office profitable, in filling his pockets with dishonest gains. But he came not in this spirit back from the stranger-land to his people. His was a patriot's heart. He loved country, he loved honor, he loved God. And so his manly statement was: "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

Noble words! Noble record did they register. Would that every youth would write these sharp, decisive words in his diary at the outset of the fresh year of his life, a monitor and a motto, for every moment or scene of crisis as the twelvemonth sweeps on. Would that he might determine to make the same resolute answer whenever the temptation shall come to do one selfish, one wicked deed.

The most tremendous word in this language we speak is that short, yet mighty word *No*. It has been the fork at the cross-roads where many a destiny has swept on one way or the other for this world or the next. Spoken at the right moment it has saved many a tottering, wavering man from disgrace, from ruin, yes, from an endless hell. The brilliant career of Joseph turned on the prompt "*No*" uttered in the nick of time. Had he stopped one minute to parley with that wanton woman (as too many young men today pause to talk with a bright-eyed temptress in the street) he would simply have been lost. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" saved him from the dizzy edge of the precipice. Daniel might easily have said to himself: "Oh, everybody in this royal household here drinks wine and lives sumptuously on the king's meat. I do not care to be odd, to seem a fanatic, a rigid Puritan." He dared to be singular. He was willing to stand alone, because he was right. At the end of two weeks he had a clearer countenance and a sweeter breath than any of the dwellers in the palace. "So did not I," was the motto of this sturdy young teetotaler of that old Oriental Court. If he had drifted on with the current of temptation, we never should have had for the imitation of the sons of men the splendid record of the Daniel who could be pure amid Babylon's dazzling sin.

My friends, have you not learned, what I

have found in my experience of life, that the man who makes a marked success in life, the man who achieves any good work for Almighty God, the man whose name is fragrant with a holy remembrance, that man, whoever he was, whoever he is, was not afraid to be thought singular?

Truth, right, greatness, always demand courage for their defence! Your moulded man of the regulation size and shape is too tame for great results. The average man, the man who glides into the crowd and marches with them and says "shibboleth" as they do, that man counts for nothing. It is when he turns around and faces the multitude as they rush on to wrong that he arrests every eye. Then by a bold protest he may put a host to flight. So Athanasius turned around and confronted the sweeping hordes of Arius, and alone in the great battle at Nice, wrested the Church's standards from an overwhelming foe and gave to all ages the comfort of a Nicene Creed, to steady and to moor the drifting faith of men to the end of time.

So, too, the young monk, Luther, stood before the armies of the papacy, brave, antagonistic. His heroic *No* nailed on the church-door of Wittenberg aroused Europe from its delusive and deadly dreams. Standing alone, he was re-enforced by the indomitable power for man—Almighty God.

But it is not only such men as Athanasius, Wycliffe, Wilberforce, Washington, or Sumner

that make their mark by being singular. Every young man or woman in the very humblest sphere, must come forth and be separate from sinners, if they wish to rescue their characters, their souls from death. The downward drag of sin is stupendous. To be able to say firmly, "Yet will I not" requires the grace from above in the heart. The swirl of the waves of this "troublesome world," as the Liturgy expresses it, is very powerful to sweep us on to shipwreck, unless we breast them and swim against them. There is a subtle pull too in the drift of sinful fashion and usage which carries away everyone who is not well anchored on a Bible conscience. Three-fourths of all the men who were drowned last year on our coast were swept out by the undertow. It is the annual experience always at the seashore. Ah! this is the secret influence which takes hold of so many members of the Church and carries them off into costly living, into sinful amusements, into cold devotion, into deadness of spiritual life, into all defection, all worldly conformities. The power that so demoralizes, is the customs, the fashions of the time. It is what others do that leads too many of us into the devious way. We dare not say to the world: "Thus do not I." My friend, every real disciple is bound to be a nonconformist here. If he is not well anchored for Christ, able to say "*No*" to the world's customs, the world's social canons, he is swept away by the insidious undertow. The bottom of the great moral deep is

strewed with the wrecked lives of just such backsliders.

My young friends who are here tonight, I would urge very earnestly this truth upon you: your salvation depends upon your ability to say "*No.*" When your principle is put into the furnace's flame, ask God's help and stand firm.

In every school the difference is clearly marked between the boy who has moral stamina and the boy who is only putty. The one knows how to say "*No*" and he says it, not defiantly, not arrogantly, not with a Pharisaic vanity, but seriously, firmly, in the fear of Almighty God. The other has the fear of being ridiculed and soon everything fresh and manly in his character dries up into a premature hardness of heart. Many a man has received the wrong bend for life because in a day of temptation among his schoolmates he could not fearlessly refuse the bait; because he had not the nerve to say "*No*" to a dishonor, a sin, a meanness. But many a boy, too, has hardened into manliness, into stalwart spiritual power, because at the critical moment when a schoolmate laughed at his conscience, though he blushed with pain at the sneer, yet he had the strength to hold his ground and firmly grasp his colors and refuse the overture of temptation. That decisive *No* was the Waterloo that ended the war. Thenceforward the victories were made easy and sure. I well remember the pressure brought to bear in college upon every young man to join in a wine-

drink, or in a smoke, or to take hand in some other contraband amusement. Some timber got well-seasoned by the test. Some of the other sort got well rotted through with sensuality and vice. They are today but water-logged driftwood—useless even for the fire—poor, shattered wrecks of humanity that have no place, no work, no hope in all God's Universe. The Nehemiahs at college have been nearly all of them, Nehemiahs ever since. The boy was father to the man.

In closing, let me note this fact. The only motive that could restrain the brave nonconformist at Jerusalem was a Godly conscience. "So did not I, *because of the fear of God.*" This ever-present principle held him firm when temptation, like a wild cyclone, swept down upon him, or even when in its more dangerous shape, like a summer storm, it overtook him. It held him, out on the sea of his voyaging, as the undercurrents struck against the keel. What the fear of God did for Nehemiah, faith in the Love of Jesus Christ will do for you. Jesus must be a pattern to you, and He must be to you a power. It is not enough to believe in Christ. You must add to your faith courage, for that is the real meaning of the word translated, *virtue*, in our English Bibles. Then with Jesus as your model, and Jesus as your inward might, you will always be able to face down temptation with the iron answer "So will not I."

DISAPPOINTMENT.

"But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan."

DEUTERONOMY IV. 22.

"But now I go my way to Him that sent me."

ST. JOHN XVI. 5.

The Law and the Gospel speak here. The Foreteller and the Foretold: Moses and Christ.

In each case death is at hand. Moses speaks within ten days, Jesus within twenty-four hours of that end of being. But how different the tone! How marked the contrast!

There is something deeply pathetic in that "must." "I must die. I must not go over." It is the language of a sadly disappointed man. It speaks of a life's hope, of a life's work, defeated and frustrated as regards the person.

It tells a sad tale of prayer unheard, at last silenced. Moses longed to have the privilege of the humblest man of Israel, to enter the land they had traveled so far, and suffered so much to reach. He prayed for it with earnest entreating supplications, but God refused his petition.

The sorrowing man tells his failure in prayer and his bitter disappointment, in the ears of the people. "The Lord," he says to the rebellious nation, "was angry with me for your sakes, and would not hear me."

The Law-giver was bearing in his day the provocations of his people, suffering in a certain sense for them. They had angered his spirit; they had depressed and daunted for a moment his invincible faith; they had drawn from him that hasty speech, that word of irritation, of impatience, almost of unbelief, by which he had failed to "sanctify God" before them, and had brought upon himself a sentence of exclusion which seemed to make the very mission a failure and a contradiction.

Mysterious, all of it, yea, as are all of God's dealings. The innocent suffer here with, and even for, the guilty. There is no proportion, there is no adjustment in this life of the destinies of good and evil.

We draw from the very disproportion, from the very injustice of the present, an argument for a future restitution, refreshing, and rectification.

But Moses could not yet perceive this. To bring immortality to light was not his office. And though we cannot doubt that one brought so very near to God, one endued with so large a share of God's grace and blessing, must have had in him an instinct of immortality, which is the attribute of all who approach and touch and live in the Divine. Still, as that great truth was not yet manifested, only typified and prefigured in the Dispensation to which he ministered, we can well perceive why earth should have been more to him than it need be, or ought to be to the Christian; why he should have struggled

and wrestled against the sentence in the only way in which God's true-hearted servants ever do wrestle, namely, in "prayer and supplication, with strong crying and tears." Also why, when prayer itself was silenced by express refusal and prohibition, he should have still smarted and writhed under a judgment to which he bowed; and here on the threshold of eternity, in this last and most thrilling farewell to his work and to his people, should have left on record in words of deepest grief and humiliation, the sentence of his shame and of his loss, "but I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan."

Brethren, disappointment is a large word in human life. Its experiences begin early. The disappointments of the child are as keen as they are transient. The mere postponement of a pleasure is sharp pain. How much more those disappointments, and they begin in youth, which mark the difference in prospect between a distinguished and a commonplace life. The loss, for example, of a school prize, of a confidential position in the business we have chosen. And the discovery which such disappointments reveal, that ours are not the talents of the few but of the many; that we must content ourselves in all probability for a lifetime with humble aims, slow advancements, and average rewards; must see rivals outstrip us every day, not by merit but by gift; and reconcile ourselves,to an uninteresting course, and a nameless memory.

But there are disappointments of a higher

rank and order than these, in proportion as the soul has dominated the life, and the cause of God has displaced the self-interest and the self-aim.

Such are the failures to reform, to redress, to reclaim, to regenerate; those baffling, daunting experiences of the patriot, the philanthropist, the pastor, the teacher. Those refusals of the boon earnestly asked, those castings out of the prayer, those silencings by God Himself of the voice of entreaty and of intercession, of which this experience of the great Law-giver is a striking illustration.

These disappointments derive their chief bitterness from the severe trial of faith which is involved in them. The cause was God's cause, and yet it was defeated; the method was God's method, and yet it was failure. The soul so perseveringly begged of Him would not be, was not won back.

The child of prayer became a castaway. The dark places of shame and misery and cruelty would not be shone into by the light of the Gospel. The life that was all God's was cut short in its usefulness; the work to which the life was given has had no decisive influence in the world.

What shall we say to these things? We know the answers of reconcilement or of palliation, ready on all lips, yet in the hour of need seldom found satisfying to the heart. We all know what mankind, compassionate, religious

mankind, would bid us answer to ourselves in these emergencies. Yet somehow the word floats, hums, buzzes around us; it will not enter, it will not grasp, it will not comfort the heart.

In proportion to the devotion is the disappointment. It is easy for the man who has given half a heart to God's work, to bear the postponement of its consummation. He cannot enter into that heart-sickness of hope deferred which adjourns to an indefinite tomorrow the completion of designs and efforts in behalf of God and His Church.

Death may be dreaded by him, but it is because it robs him of life, not because it hides the view of God's people entering on their inheritance. Such thoughts, such sorrows, are for him only whose soul has been given to God, and whose life has been one freewill sacrifice in the cause of truth and righteousness.

Then, to be taken away, not from the evil but from the good which is about to be manifested; to find health failing and power decaying and life ebbing, just as the long effort of youth and age is to be crowned with success; to leave to another the passage of that Jordan to the very margin of which he has led his people; and instead of going over before them to be vouchsafed only one distant look upon the goodly heritage, and then to die, this was the trial of God's servant whose words we are studying. This has been the trial in all ages, of the pioneers of Gospel progress. This will be our trial just

in proportion as we throw ourselves with keen and eager interest into the mighty work of God in man's behalf.

For the same life, the same man (in this sense) both sows and reaps. The hindrances to any Divine work are too many and too great to be overcome in one generation. That which we reap must be another's sowing, and that which we sow in tears shall be for another to reap in joy.

It is well. Doubtless it is well. This puts us in our proper place as creatures and as sinners. This keeps us mindful of our littleness as the one, of our doom as the other. Not on this side of the grave but on the other, can it be either safe for us or true, to see the fruit of our toiling. Work itself would become a snare if it gave any wages but hope to the laborer who has yet to die. We can bear but little success.

Meanwhile, let us reconcile ourselves to a life of disappointment, as much in heavenly things as in earthly, by thoughts at once sobering and comforting. We are not isolated units. We are members of a body. To each one of us is given grace; something to do, and the means of doing it; responsibilities real and grave; opportunities brief but abundant; influences passive and active; relationships ours alone, and which if we do not exercise as we ought, none other, absolutely none other, can.

Thus the individual has his place assigned him; his place, his work, and his reward. Yet he is but one link in the long chain, and his happiness

lies in remembering it. "There is one body and one spirit." The life of the whole is dependent upon the life of the constituent parts, yet no one part must obtrude itself into prominent notice, or expect to be recognized in the process or in the end.

One by one we die, but the life lives on. The law-giver disappears, and the warrior succeeds him; himself also to disappear in turn, making way for judge and prophet and king; at last, for Him in whom all have their end and their satisfaction.

"I must die in this land. I must not go over Jordan; but ye shall go over." Ye, the Church, ye, the race, and God will raise you up age by age, the fitting leader, the best leader, the wise deliverer.

Turn we then from the servant to the Master, from the human to the Divine, from Moses to Christ.

When Christ spoke the words of our text He was on the eve of His Passion. He was to suffer that night as man, mere man, could not. To the eye of sense His work was far from its finish. What was there that night to show for it? A little band of weak, wavering, vacillating disciples; one gone out to betray, another going forth to deny, the rest, all of them, to forsake Him.

Who among all God's servants, who in any darkest age of the Church, ever left a work so incomplete? We who now in the light of history know what it all meant, can scarcely appreciate

the majesty of that faith which could go forth to die at that moment.

Jesus says not "'But I must die.' I must leave these few timid sheep in earth's wilderness. I must close my ministry. I must go into the valley of the dark shadow, and trust my work with my God."

No! His is a different tone, a different feeling. He speaks not of the Thing *left*, but of the Person *returned to*. "Now I go my way to Him that sent me." He saw the mission fulfilled, and He saw the Heaven opened.

And in these two thoughts lies the cure of all disappointment for the disciple who would be as his Master.

Is the life short, sad, poor, disappointing? Is it full of sorrow, of care, of dulness? Is it a small thing, small in its efforts, small in its achievements? Do you hold it by a frail tenure? And are you summoned away from it just when you seemed to be at the point of some success, some fruit, some recompense of reward?

Must you leave another to carry across Jordan those whom you had led to it; and to give rest to loved and loving souls of which you had borne through many a cloudy and dark day the cumbrance and the anxiety?

Well, but there is One who arranges, who ordains these things for us all. He sends us as He sent Christ. We have a mission, like Him, and when that mission is performed we too, are called Home.

Let us rise, all of us, to this conception—the mission, the Apostleship of life. The word Apostle means *one sent*. We then are Apostles—ones sent. You know well enough that there is something, that there is someone, for which, for whom you can do, or could have done much.

Where is the life so contracted, so isolated, so pitiable that it has absolutely no one, nothing, in it but itself? If you have imagined this, reconsider it. We know better. We know that we might have been God's messengers, God's Apostles, each of us, to some other, some younger, some poorer, some more ignorant, more miserable one, near to whom it pleased Him to place us. Let this light shine into your life, the light of this thought, and you will be a happier, you will be a better man instantly.

But suppose you have realized this. And suppose that your trouble is that your work does not seem to be prospering. Or, suppose that you are trembling, as so many have trembled before you, lest you should be taken away before it is done; lest you should not live to see the success of that scheme, of that enterprise, of that work with which you have charged yourself; lest you should leave that undertaking in jeopardy, let us say plainly, that soul unsaved, which you had made your solemn mission, your apostleship for Jesus Christ below.

Think then of Him, how that night, that awful night, with Gethsemane before Him, and Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod, and the Cross,

and the grave and Hades awaiting Him, He was able to sit and converse calmly in that guest chamber with those poor, ignorant irresolute few, whom He was to leave here below, as sheep among wolves; just because He felt that God had sent Him, and that God could take charge of His own work.

So then if God honors you by giving you what we call an exceptional work; if He grants you success, makes you a shining light, brings lives, souls, dying, immortal men to Himself through your efforts, see yourself little in all this, and God alone great. Place yourself and also your work, in His hands. And when He calls you away from it, done, as you judge, or undone, say only this: "I go to Him, that sent me."

This was what Moses could but half see, this going away to Him who had given the commission. It was but a dim, half-light that he could have had in his day. Length of days was then the reward, to have them cut short was then the punishment.

But the revelation to him at that moment when the hand of God laid him to rest on the lonely mount, must have been enrapturing as he saw the unseen, and learned that his mission was ended, and that he, like St. Paul, had "fought the good fight," that "henceforth there was the crown."

Let us not give up this hope. Let us hold fast the assurance that death shall be gain, gain for all who have first realized their apostleship.

We are unbelieving people, the best of us. We still mourn for the dead almost as those who have no hope. We still cling with a greedy grasp to this dying life as though it were the whole of being.

Which of us believes in God's presence as his own Rest and Home? Which of us is willing to depart, believing it to be far better? This burdensome, soul-crushing life, of sense and time, how does it enchain, how does it bewitch us! Live more, my friends, in the invisible, lest haply when death comes you shall find yourselves strangers "in that world."

Go apart with God, like Moses, till the face shines with His glory. Then come back to earth and converse with us. We want these testimonies, these evidences, everyone of us, of things unseen. For lack of them we are poor and naked and earth-bound—give them to us. They are the right of Gospel days and of Church worshippers. We may all be witnesses to each other, if we will, of God and Christ, of eternity and Heaven. This constitutes the peace of God, every Christian may taste that. One hour, one moment, with God, alone in the secret chamber, in the desert of sorrow, in the wilderness of desolation, will do more for you than all the rites of religion. Wait then, watch for God. Say to Him "I will not let Thee go, except thou bless me."

At last, when the great call comes, you shall say not, "I must die"; not "I must leave work

and charge and kindred and home," but "I have a desire to depart." Yea, in the satisfied words of Him who is holy; "Now I go my way to Him that sent me."

CHRISTIAN GRACES.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

GALATIANS V. 22, 23.

It seems like a group of pearls to me that the Apostle has strung together as an amulet for the neck of the Christian disciple when he goes forth to life's war. As I look upon this collection of sweet graces which the Apostle has twined together in the text, it seems to depict the round of the Christian life, its pains and needs and conflicts, and the cure and the balsam and the aid for each.

It is no chance grouping of kindred virtues slightly distinguished from each other which we have here. It was the experience of a man who had known the temptations of mind and spirit, the battles with intellect and in the soul, the wants and yearnings and doubts and falls in life, which wrought this talisman for the soul's defence. I read this category and I learn how grace may give me all that is sufficient to sustain and protect and aid and gain triumph in all life's bitterest and longest and most complex spiritual conflicts. The Holy Spirit bestows the graces, when earnestly sought, which are like the invisible armor of the knight of ancient

story, unyielding steel to the fiercest darts of an untiring and a sleepless foe.

Now the heart of fallen man is not by its nature the seat of these graces of a Christian. A wise old sage has proclaimed what all ages of men since he spoke have painfully verified, "That this heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Famous places of resort as mountain summits or battle monuments are often covered over with deep-cut inscriptions of every kind and age, records of ambition or folly or wanton injury. How like the natural heart of man, that, more lasting than the granite rock, invites every comer to cut his name upon it and so each wrong passion and evil desire carves its record there. The sea rolls on, the heavens move, the earth never stands still. Thus the heart of man never rests, sleeping or waking. Lust entices it, vanity possesses it, anger disquiets it, pleasure seduces it, envy torments it, sorrow and sadness vex and molest it. It is the victim and the bond-slave of evil. Said keen old Luther one day: "I am more afraid of my own heart than of the Pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope—self." It finds no rest until it comes to Christ, until the Spirit of Christ sweeps over it and tunes the discords to harmony. If we are wise we will trust to no other influence but that, to bring these hearts in consonance with the holiness of God.

There are those who wait till trial comes.

But I beseech you trust not in any unsanctified afflictions. These cannot permanently and truly change the condition of your heart. I have seen the characters of the writing remain on paper which the flames had turned into a film of buoyant coal. I have seen the thread that had been passed through the fire retain in its cold grey ashes the twist it had received in spinning. I have found every shivered splinter of the flint as hard as the unbroken stone: and let trials come, in Providence, sharp as the fire and ponderous as the crushing hammer, unless a gracious God send along with these something else—bruised, broken, bleeding as your heart may be—its nature remains the same. There must be the breathing of the Spirit of God upon it or it will be but a hot, dry Sahara still.

The Holy Ghost then must dwell in us in order to produce this train of Christian graces which the text recites. Says a great Apostle: "Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." It is as He dwells in us, abides in the heart that the graces gradually develop, one by one. It is no sudden work that is wrought. It is not revolution, not strokes of lightning. It is growth, gradual upbuilding, step by step advance. I have seen a painter whose purpose was to give a lifelike representation upon the canvas, of the person sitting before him. Frequently and through many sittings he gazed upon that face, until all its features seemed to be impressed upon his heart, and then the

brush transferred it in color to the blank surface upon the easel. In the same way it is upon the heart that the image of Jesus Christ must first be formed and then afterwards transferred into a holy life and an affectionate and godly walk. Once impressed upon the heart it must soon show itself in the thought, word, deed and gesture. And in this work we must never grow weary in our portion of it, for we, too, have a part. A picture is not painted by a stroke, but is brought, by slow degrees, after many sittings, and long studying, and with cautious touches to perfection.

And now let us ask what are the channels, what the operations of this Holy Spirit in the soul of a man. It is as we are in communion with Christ that we may look for His work in the soul. Communion with Jesus means no vague profession of Him; no emotional affection for Him; no indefinite acknowledgment of His power, love, mercy. It means surrender of heart and life to Him, not in any self-appointed sacrifices, not in any pet ways of showing love to Him, but in His Church and by and through obedience to His commands. His directions, His system for winning His grace are definite, are unchangeable. There is no chance in them. They are positive and unmistakable and methodical. The law is the same for all. Repentance, faith, membership of His Church through Holy Baptism, prayer, use of ordinances and the Divine Word, cultivation of heart and life, a steady,

onward progress in holy living and devout exercises and resistances of evil. As we work the Holy Spirit works in us. "We strive together with Him." And as we labor, gradually, surely "He," as He has promised "giveth more grace." He enlightens the understanding in the knowledge of Christ. He captivates the affections with the love of Christ. The cold, freezing soul, which of itself would but perish, kindles with the flame of a Divine love; and so it burns with a holy glow and throws warmth and animation into our devotional work and religious duty. He inclines, too, the will in obedience to Christ. No power short of that He exerts can bend this proud spirit of a man. It is not violence He employs against the sinner. He is powerfully yet sweetly drawn, made willing in the day of God's power.

And, too, He forms the soul in the likeness of Christ. There cannot be a sincere communion with that Saviour in His Church without a yearning to conform to His image. The wax when melted will receive the impression of the seal. And so the Holy Spirit softens these human hearts that they may receive upon them the image of Christ. These are the means, these the channels through which the Holy Ghost cultivates and brings forth in your heart and mine the fruits of the spirit. They are not of nature, they are not of human merit; they cannot come of any man's labor. They are only the gift of God's Spirit. That is the lesson of

this sermon. That is the truth I would have you learn today. "It is God that worketh both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

But remember it is a grace that must not be waited for: it is a presence, a power in these souls that must be sought and installed there by our own hands. We are not immovable stone images, we are living men. We are not victims of blind fate, an inanimate wax to be stamped and moulded and dragged hither and thither at will. We are conscious beings, responsible agents, with will and thought and spiritual power. We must consciously act, consciously seek, consciously plan to win grace. We must labor to cast down His foes and enthrone Jesus Christ in this heart. Not in our own strength shall we struggle, not by our own power shall we conquer.

"The work to be performed is ours,
The strength is all God's own.
'Tis He that works to will;
'Tis He that works to do.
His is the power by which we act,
His be the glory, too."

It is as we give Him who is our Redeemer, chief place in these souls that we achieve, as we crown Him Lord and Hope and Strength and Life, that we gain the grace which wins victory and yields fadeless fruit. A tradesman in a bazaar hung out for sale his pictures of men famous in their degree and their differing walks

of life; among them was one of the Redeemer of men. Divers men purchased according to their several fancies. The soldier buys his Caesar, the lawyer his Justinian, the physician his Galen, the philosopher, his Aristotle, the poet his Virgil, the orator his Cicero, and the divine his Augustine, every man after the dictation of his taste and his own heart. The picture of Christ hung by still, of less price than the rest. A poor shopman who had no more money than the little sum that would purchase it, bought that print, saying: "Now that every man has borne away his god, I too, will take mine to myself."

So, while the covetous repair to their riches, like birds to their nests, the ambitious to their honors, the learned to their arts, the atheist to his sensual refuge, the worldling to his pleasure, while all these seek the havens their hearts yearn to reach, the devout soul will have no other sanctuary, fix upon no other object but Christ Jesus—not pictured on the walls of an earthly chamber, but enshrined in supremest majesty and forever and ever in the inner sanctuary of the heart. And that abiding presence must be a continual power to guide into paths of victory and ways of holiness and peace.

My brother, my closing question to you is that which Apostles asked of certain to whom they were sent ages ago: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" I mean, is He a living, abiding, beloved, obeyed Presence in your heart? Ah, then, may you with the confidence of the old

Prophet exclaim through blinding storm and hot gusts of trial, in all days of sorrow and nights of gloom: "When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me."

"God is my Salvation,
What foe have I to fear?
In darkness and temptation,
My light, my help is near."

And in such confidence we may toil on and fight on and at the last it shall be rest and victory.

ENVY.

" Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

ESTHER V. 13.

A great truth is here exemplified. This human nature of ours testifies that Haman's speech is no word of fiction, that it shows the living spirit of a living man. Haman, the Persian, has reached the post in the kingdom next to the sovereign. He is prime minister. He is nearest the royal person, and is the envy of a host of fawning satellites.

But among the retainers in the king's household, is one Mordecai, a faithful, wise Jew. As a chief officer of the palace he is honored with a seat at the gate. As the secretary of state, the royal favorite, passes in and out, all bow down before him. But the Jew yields him only a meagre reverence. It is a bitter dreg in Haman's sweet chalice. That this obscure Jew should not pay him homage makes wealth, slaves, his princely splendor of but small account. He will have his revenge. Nothing less than the destruction of the whole nation of the Jews will appease the wrath of this pampered favorite of an Oriental court.

But wise Mordecai's skill and Esther's bravery thwart the mad plotting of the revengeful

prime minister. By one of those quick turns of a stern justice, so common in the East, where the bowstring today strangles the favorite of yesterday, Haman is hanged on his own gallows. His mad envy overwhelmed him with the destruction he made for others. He himself was dashed to pieces on the very rocks where he had hoped Mordecai would have been made shipwreck.

It is one who has read men with a keen eyesight that penned this story. What a picture is it of the weird power of one of the master passions that conquers men, and lies coiled in these winding hearts. I would examine this spirit of an envious selfishness as it is found under its many social disguises.

It is not an unusual vice. But very often the eyes of conscience are blind to its presence in the heart. When a history like Haman's is spread before our view on the printed page we can trace each chapter in the base progress from the poor self-conceit to the last intrigue and the final act of death. But we do not thus behold the foul passions of our hearts revealed in the midst of our modern social wrappings. We are all of us more or less victims of the same illusion in morals as in costume. We readily mistake the headdress and the padding for the meagre reality behind them. And thus the very passion of which we speak often passes for a princely virtue.

There have been moralists who have not

scrupled to declare that envy is one of the most laudable of emotions, and that without it there would be nothing to prompt us to rise above our lowly lot in life. I admit that it is duty to win the best victory in our power, to rise to highest posts. It is an unselfish, honorable rivalry that the Apostle commands when he urges us to "covet earnestly the best gifts." There is no wrong in entering the lists for the fair races of the world for position, for fame, for wealth in Christian moderation. But when we mistake this for the spirit that seeks not the righteous, equitable rewards of labor, not just superiority in knowledge, in skill, in influence, but a selfish monopoly, an overweening, a dishonorable lust, then the natural desire, the proper zeal is perverted to a sordid vice, a greed, a hateful selfishness. And when we thus strip it of its flaunting, rich disguises, when we track it, as in Haman's history, into its hiding places of cunning, of greed, of hate, we find what arts of fraud, what unblushing manners, what social hatreds, what vulgar spite it can beget, then we may sometimes be disgusted with the most brilliant masquerades of the world.

But not to be general. Wherever I turn I see this portraiture of the Persian courtier. Here is a successful merchant who has won vast wealth in the walks of trade until at last he has reached the acme of a just ambition: all seas bear his merchandise on their bosoms, all men

pay him honor on the exchange; in his home he has every luxury that refinement and taste may long for. Yet all this avails him nothing. Some Mordecai sits at the gate. Some rival in business has reached a post just beyond his. He is wretched. His riches are no joy to him; a secret envy gnaws within. He cannot rest. It goads him to a selfish, dishonorable competition. And he whom the wise, onlooking world thinks so high above all sordid cares, so peerless in his happiness, so favored and blessed, is in truth as wretched as if he were the poorest of his flatterers, as if he were the most wearied, ground-down drudge in his service. His days are consumed with crafty plans, he can stoop to petty arts and dishonorable treacheries and base intrigues that would call a blush to the face of an honest man. At last his selfish aim overreaches itself. In his greed he forgets his own sagacity, and a sudden reverse tumbles his fortune to the dust.

Ask yourself what hundreds there are of such deluded men in this driving whirlpool of social life. What solid happiness is daily flung away by those who rank among the shrewd and the wise in the concerns of this perishing world.

Turn now to another example of this same delusion. You enter into the circle of fashion. There you see the woman whose beauty and wit win the homage of a host. Her life seems in an Elysium. She appears to have no trouble, no care. She apparently dwells in an enchanted

garden where the roses are thornless and the air is laden with fragrance. All smile sweetly and talk in elegant phrase and make vocal with song. And yet it is all masquerade. The heart of that petted belle, swept by gusts of discontent, is the abiding-place of scorching social passions. Some Mordecai sits at her gate. Some rival has disputed her sole claim to the throne of fashion, and all the splendors of the salon and the great banquet have waxed pale. She is more wretched than the wan mantua-maker that stitched her ball dress, or the servant that drudges in her kitchen.

And this is the life and world of rich splendor, of elegant manners, for which so many sigh as for an unknown Paradise. It proves too often like the Dead Sea apples, fair outside, only ashes within.

And so through all the ranks and strata of our humanity it is this constant spectacle of social envy and social discontent. In the hovel or the palace among the great or the lowly, with prince or with serf, with capital or with labor, with socialist or multi-millionaire, it is the same picture of a consuming envy, a poor, narrow selfishness. All at the height, the mountain-top of their attainments see some object just beyond, some happier rival who disturbs their selfish whim. This is the wisdom of the world. This is what men and women call life, this restless torment of the desires, this unceasing fever of envy followed by disgust, this selfish

phantom chase of objects that cannot satisfy but can only leave behind sordid care and self-consumption.

We have seen the morbid nature of this passion. And we may also learn that it is the very destruction of the happiness we seek. It is the doom always of Haman to hang on the gallows he sets up. The pursuit of any unselfish duty has its sure reward; and we may have with it a sufficiency of wealth and honor and long life, if they come in the way of an honorable gain. But the pursuit of a self-seeking ambition has no limit. It is insatiable in its greed, like the sand on which the waters pour, drinking them in with an endless thirst. It grows by what it feeds on. Instead of sober aims, of moderate expectations, of rational and well-regulated plans of life, it substitutes an intoxicated fancy, a diseased hope, a mad dream. Great God! what is so bottomless in its depths of folly as the heart of man! What whirlpool of the ocean has such swift swallowing eddies that drag all things to ruin! What is the social life of hundreds who are coveting what they call good, but the repetition of the lost souls pouring water forever in a sieve, rolling up the steep hill the stone that always falls back, grasping after the Tantalus cup that always is spilled as the lips touch the brim.

It is, I repeat, the effect of this sordid passion inevitably to destroy the happiness it craves. It may be, as in the history of this

Persian courtier and thousands like it, by the sudden ruin that overwhelms the man at the close of his selfish years. There is nothing more striking than the power portrayed here which a self-seeking ambition has to blind the most shrewd intellect; and lead it to destruction through its own delusions. The prosperous grows arrogant in triumph; he forgets his prudent foresight and believes in his omnipotence over fortune. His vices lose their caution. He throws all in one cast on the gambling-table of life and is lost forever. The world is full of the fragments of such shipwrecks strewed along the beach of social life; the adventurers in trade, the shrewd disputants in the race for public honors, the leaders of fashion once brilliant but now broken, the victims of their own self-deceived lusts. Yet these are only a few among the many that meet the same punishment but are not so visible to common eyes.

It may be that fortune brings no outer reverses, that a man may get and keep his selfish wealth, his reputation; yet it is no less sure, if we look behind the mask, that we shall find palaces enough where the Hamans sit unhappy in the midst of the banquet, where sordid cares and mean passions, strifes and hates, are the only inmates.

And, therefore, I repeat the wisdom of Him who is the Teacher of the art of life: "Is not the life more than meat?" Is it wisdom to lose life for the selfish anxieties of life? It is the lesson

for this time when each shrewd, unscrupulous adventurer is the model of success, and the popular idol. But be assured, my brethren, that the law of God is as real in the reckonings of trade, in the economy of social gain as in the unseen life of the heart. A pure conscience, a well-disciplined aim, a temperate will, a calm contentment such as only comes from a Christian godliness, these have the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE.

"Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

NEHEMIAH VIII. 10.

Israel had returned from those years of suffering captivity. No longer did Babylon's chains weigh them; manacles were broken; fetters were cast off. They were God's free men again. Home from the foreign land. Home, amid the crags and the plains and the streams and the forests of loved Fatherland; home, where hearths were and friends were, and altars were, and graves of kindred were. What wonder that there were thrilling hearts, that there were exulting songs, that there were joyous throngs! With patriotic gladness and a devout yearning they crowded into their cities. They besought that the ancient books of God, the law of holiness and life, might be brought from the sanctuary and read in their ears. It was a mighty throng of earnest listeners that stood reverently hearkening to those words of inspiration as they were recited in their hearing from early dawn until midday.

To hear the holy revelations of those Divine books once more, to stand on the old streets

among the old homes where the dear firesides and the precious memories crowded around, to feel the heartbeats of fellow-countrymen, to have the old thrill as friend's hand clasped friend's hand, to see the same sunshine and the same swelling hilltops and the same running streams and the same flower-tinted sod laughing out their welcome to the banished ones, come back from the exile country, this surge of privilege, this floodtide of emotions stirred the fountain of tears in all those thronging multitudes, and in each assemblage there was a weeping host.

In the strong words of the harper-king "their souls melted away because of their trouble." It was the pathos of patriot hearts finding its vent after those years of oppression and toil and indignity, of shame and suffering and wrong under an enemy's tyranny and in an alien's land.

But anon the wave of feeling passed and the voice of the Lord's servant was heard and he cried: "This day is holy unto the Lord, your God, mourn not, nor weep." Then he said to them: "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Thus the chosen servants of the Most High—Ezra, Nehemiah—exhorted the people to dry their tears, and in the call of the text summoned them to festival

joys and to the gladness which comes from hope and privilege and liberty. It was to be a festivity. There was to be the eating and drinking. Dainties were to enter into their feasts. It was to be a rejoicing time. Luxuries—the fat things, the sweet things—were to be enjoyed with a sacred mirth. "Eat the fat and drink the sweet," was the command, and he added, "send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared." This latter direction means in the day of your feasting and your joy, remember the poor, send the loving portion to your brother who needs. We are all children of one Father, God.

Here then we have no spirit of a monkish, or of a hard ascetic piety. Here we find God's inspired priests commanding the enjoyment of the good things of this good world, commanding a cheerful mirth. They declare that joy is the Lord's—that in it, by it, is strength. I learn then that a Puritan's austerity or a convent's iron hardness has no demand from the tender voice of my royal Father above. His proclamation to a sorrowing, lost world on this great day of days—angels announce it, the blazing star, the light in the Bethlehem manger which spread with glory every face bending and gazing in wonder there, tell it: "Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy."

And so this ancient experience of God's chosen people shall tell us the spirit of this festival-day, this day when the great deliverer brought back his people, exiled by sin, from their banishment

in the captive-land where was no hope and only death.

Joy is the thought for Christmas. We clasp a friend's hand and wish him a merrie day. How wonderful it is that the birth of a peasant-baby, a Jew in a petty city, under meanest circumstances, nineteen centuries ago, should have become so interminably interlaced and inwrought and embroidered all over with this thrilling idea of joy. And yet His name given by inspired prophetic voice was "Man of Sorrows." A malefactor's cross darkened all His pathway from Bethlehem to Nazareth and from Nazareth to Calvary. Friends betrayed, potentates persecuted, soldiers crucified. He was despised and rejected of men. His death was on a gibbet and His own countrymen reviled Him as an imposter and blasphemer. But so great is the force of the joyous idea which has been linked to Him that all the after shadows are swallowed up in the great and glad power of His name, who came as sunlight to the world—who was "the bright and morning star," who was "the Sun of righteousness risen with healing in His wings."

And this sense of joy has lingered and is yet a power in this weary world in spite of disappointment in the long search for a Utopia. Shall we conclude with the pessimist that hope so dominates man that he still follows a will-o'-the-wisp notwithstanding the voice of rigid experience calling from the deluding dream to

stern reality? Shall we say that with a reckless despair men are chanting the old carols and speaking the old greetings although the voice of Hope has long ago died from their ears and their hearts? Or shall we say that "Hope changes her dreams from century to century, while her nature remains the same and her voice still is strong and sweet to charm men's ears?" The reply to such queries is that the genuine joy at this glad season comes of our bond with others. The self that will sometimes mount a pedestal or creep away to a corner in a personal isolation steals out under the sunny influence of Christmas to put its warm hand into another human hand. If we go our ways to eat the fat and drink the sweet we do not forget to send a portion to those who have none. We give because we are mindful of the great everlasting Gift, the mighty gift of the eternal Son to all the sons of men.

Yes! under such an influence, with such a remembrance, in the presence of such an august Gift we unseal our hearts. Thought goes out to dear ones; alienations cease; resentments fade; hearts flow together; foes of the past clasp hands. It is Christmas. An angel's carol sounds in our ears. We hear its glad echo although more than nineteen centuries have swept by since it roused the stillness of that calm night in Bethlehem's plains, and its loving strains fill our souls—"peace on earth, good-will to men"—good-will among men.

Yes, this is the Christmas thought, this the blinding splendor, this the endless glory, this the overwhelming joy of the birthday of Jesus, Son of Mary—man—Jesus, Son of God, the Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And so with the wondering maiden-mother, with startled shepherds of the plain, with wise kings of the Orient, with adoring angels from the heavenly throne I cast myself down at that manger and I worship awed and reverent and loving the holy Babe that is cradled there, and in a very ecstacy I kiss the feet of Him who is my all-in-all, who is my King, my Saviour, my God.

Ah! with such an adoration, in such an awful Presence life becomes radiant joy; the shadows and the sadness flee away; faith unveils an opened Heaven; the infant of the manger reveals to my charmed, wondering sight an endless life, an eternal bliss.

It is true that sometimes the soul is sad by the Christmas hearth. But is it not also true that the melancholy amid the Christmas gladness comes of the yearnings of our affections? "Beneath the joy there is something that is mightier than mirth." Christmas bliss means softened feelings, fuller currents of sympathy, quicker pulses of affection, larger-heartedness; generous charity. Behind the gladness of Christmas, love stands and the joy of the day is a joy which owes its character and its life to the

realization of the strength and power of the attachments and duties which love creates and which love inspires.

As we grasp this truth the coarser tones of festival joy will fade. We will catch the finer notes which affection, which faith, which devotion, which high aspiration sound forth. They shall be the sweet cadences of souls—souls touched by the holy fire that flames in the glowing heart of the glorious God. So, our hearts are glad and in the overflowings of joy that come with this confidence and this knowledge we raise our voices in happy anthem and thanking song, we bend our knees at yon Altar with lifted heart and adoring awe, we bow our souls at the feet of the Infant King, who though robed in flesh is the Eternal and the Almighty God. With such an adoration, with bowed head, with the worship of all our spirit we consecrate afresh this new life to the adorable Redeemer, we become anew loyal and leal followers of the great Captain, Jesus.

So, too, shall we go forth to the joys that beam out of a Christian love. We shall "go our ways to eat the fat and drink the sweet and we shall not forget to send a portion to those who have none."

Christmas day, too, is the day of childhood. In its mirthful cheer we are all as children. Melancholy indeed is his lot whom the world's jostling has robbed of the power to see charm in the joys of childhood. It is a great thing to

keep the child-heart even after the grey hairs have come. The world snatches it from us. It gives us instead, the heart full of cares, of eager covetousness, of envious resentments, of hard doubt, of suspicious fears. Shadow falls where sunlight only should make radiant. "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The power of the Kingdom can only be understood by those who are in the Kingdom and the absence of the fresh single-minded heart, excludes from the Kingdom.

As we mingle in the child pleasures of this Christmastide, let us seek once more the child-like heart, the single eye that fills the whole body with light, the simple trust that baffles the deceit and guile of men. Oh! men and women of the world, ye, who have forgotten the innocent, childish days of long ago; ye, who in the scrambles and competitions and schemings and thirsty ambitions have only husks, only a dry Sahara-life as the fruit of those long years of straining toil, turn your eyes to the Bethlehem manger. See in the sinless, confiding, tender childhood there mirrored and there glorified, see the pattern for your own higher life, battered, stained, tainted, blurred though that life may be today.

Finally, Christmas is the day of sacrificing love. It is the day when, to a degree, self is dethroned. Life seems to increase selfishness. Our personal interest, our individual advantage

is the problem, men are ever straining to solve. Experience tells us that in the world as it is constituted today—as we have constituted it, not God—each man must be for himself. Remember "Number One" is the law. But the Gospel tells us better as it shows us a manger cradle and an infant king at Bethlehem. It teaches us that each man is to be for his brother-man. The joy of the world, the mitigation of its hardships, the alleviation of its sorrows are not matters outside our interest. They are the very things for which we should have eyes and hearts. Not with signs of sovereign power did Christ come to speak a royal fiat and abolish all ill-will, but under limitations, by self-sacrifice, by patience and thought and effort, by doing kindly acts and speaking kindly words, by the sovereign power of simple and self-forgetting love, did He live and work in the earth. And so was the world brought to the feet of God: not by might, not by power, but by the spirit which was God's. Let self then be flung aside on Christmas day and always. Let us throw ourselves into the joys of others, forgetting our own sorrows; into the sorrows of others, forgetting our own pleasures. So shall we find a joy which is mighty because it springs from a love which is Divinely given. We shall understand the joy of the Lord and in being like Him and in doing His will, we shall find that the joy of the Lord is our strength.

ANXIETY.

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow."

St. Matthew VI. 34.

I am afraid that too many of us think this only a meaningless sentiment.

A man of business who is looking for the dividends of his investments, a poor householder who finds it difficult to earn the loaf that feeds his children, may read it with much misgiving.

In fact, the objection which the sagacious man of the world urges most strenuously against Christian doctrine, is that it teaches us motives too unreal in a life like ours of hunger and cold and complex wants; and so he concludes that a Christian must be either a simple enthusiast or a hypocrite.

What, then, is the spirit which our Master here enjoins? It is of great importance for us to learn that this Gospel of Jesus does not give us any dreamy notion of life, but is as prudent a guide in the business of time as of eternity.

Anyone reading carefully this portion of the Sermon on the Mount will at once perceive that there is one main thought linking together these scattered precepts. Christ is distinguishing the spirit of his true followers in the common concerns of life from that spurious morality of the

Pharisee, which made men strict in religious worship but as base and earthly as others in their conduct.

Faith in God, that real, childlike faith which is carried even into the things of daily business, is the mark of the Christian.

When we are told to consider the lilies or the sparrow that is fed by God's hand, it is not implied that we are like the lily, growing by the unconscious law of nature, or the sparrow guided by mere instinct.

To "take no thought for the morrow" must not be interpreted so as to destroy the demands of common sense, or the rules of common language. The word *thought* meant in the day when the Bible was translated, to distract, or divide the mind. It might therefore, be properly rendered—have no such over-anxious concern for the future as will divide the mind from its present faith, its present duty. Our wise Master as He rebukes the worldly anxiety of men, would not teach them to forget the necessary prudence of life.

God has formed us with this power to reason, this faculty which can look forward and backward; has left us, therefore, in many things less provided than inferior creatures, because we have a nobler gift of foresight.

Prudence or providence is the secret of all we gain. We must sow in Spring if we would have an Autumn harvest. We must buy and sell if we would increase our store. We must in

myriad duties take thought for the morrow, if we be wise men.

A Christian trust never means a reckless indifference to the future. The sleep of a clam is not the peace of a Christian. The ignorant bliss of a child or a savage, who has no care because no thought beyond the moment, is not to be envied.

As we rise in the scale of being from the vegetable to the man, from the illiterate to the civilized, we increase the capacities of pleasure, and with it, of pain.

We are never, therefore, to confound with this spirit of the Gospel that foolish faith which leads some men to neglect all diligence in worldly affairs; as I have read of one who when in want of bread or of a new garment, was wont to pray instead of work, and always received a supply by direct miracle. But, I doubt it.

Such faith is indolence. God does not feed and clothe us without labor and care on our part. The religion of Jesus, the Wise, bids us to "be diligent in business"; "to provide for our households"; tells us "the hand of the diligent maketh rich," inculcates every virtue of daily life.

There is a story of the Arabian prophet, that he saw a poor devotee hunting in vain for his camel which had run wild while he was at his prayers. The prophet said to him: "Trust in God, but tie your camel."

There is no piety in carelessness, no piety in

sloth, in indifference, none in devotion which ignores the practical concerns of this workday life.

And now the spirit of this precept lies simply in living truly in the day, making the best of life as it is. Although we must cherish a wise foresight for the future, yet, if this create such discontent as to overshadow the present, to destroy the very sources of our real enjoyment, it is far from wisdom.

And when then we ask what is the deepest cause of the misery, nay more, of the worldly impiety of men, we shall find it lies in this spirit which our Lord rebuked.

We turn to the thousands who in every sphere of social gain are seeking the phantom of happiness, and where do we find the happy man? Not in the possessor of millions, for he is always grasping at more; not in the aspirant after reputation, for he must give years of toil for it, and his thirst always grows with the gratification of it; but in a few only who have learned to husband well, and in a calm, religious spirit, the resources of the present.

Here is a man engrossed in a large lucrative business, he has the name of a most sagacious merchant; he is a by-word of prosperity throughout the land. But alas! poor man, his sagacity has not taught him the simple art of enjoying for an hour what he has. His house may be a palace crowded with luxuries, but his mind is night and day wearied with plans of the future,

and if he does not see his fortune vanish he grows old in the same restless dream. And all his years and wealth together have not brought him as real a comfort as the poorest peasant has enjoyed.

Another has from his earliest youth lived in great schemes of personal ambition. He has renounced the healthy habits of mind and heart, the path of sober action; and year after year he has steadily pursued one glittering prize. At last he has gained it, and he suddenly awakes to find that his life has gone in the dream of what was not worth the effort. Its calm pleasures were not his, and the selfish vision of the future is a present emptiness.

This is the history of the world. It is true in a degree with almost all of us. Almost all instead of accepting life as God sends it and making the best of it, are shaping to themselves some fancy ideal of it in the future. Yet this is folly. None can know what is to be on the morrow. We weave our plans in youth, careless, nay, never asking whether they are consistent with God's plans or no. By and by the ideal happiness becomes a real disappointment. Who of us has not this experience?

This anxiety for the future lies at the root of more than half the evils that overshadow us. We need not underrate the grave trials that meet us, but if we fairly weigh them we shall find that to a prodigious extent they are in our own diseased imaginations. We fret under

some expected trouble, we please ourselves with some unsound hopes, and our dread or our disappointment becomes as real as a sickness or a loss.

It is this disposition that leads us to gnawing discontent with our own lot. What envy, what silly covetousness after the most impossible gains, what thousands who wear life away in the wish to be a little richer or greater than their neighbors, and meantime lose the nobler wealth God has given them in their own homes and hearts.

It is this disposition that leads to the worst and basest type of mercenary character. We cannot always or often count the results of our action, but we see before us, all of us, at all times, the path of plain duty. It is never doubtful, except as our own perversion or wilful blindness has clouded the view. This we are to follow—then leave the consequence to God.

But with the crafty man of the world, the gain-lover, the politician who asks the price of his patriotism, the compromising conscience of every sort, the only question is, "what shall be my reward tomorrow?" And so, like Gehazi, the sagacious servant of Elisha, he will look carefully for his talents and changes of raiment and get with them a leprosy forever.

But how can I set forth all the effects of this vice? It is, in a word, the abuse of the very purpose of life. Life is not a dream. Yet we make it such. Our keenest wisdom can never

foresee the whole future and arrange all our plans to meet our wishes, but we must always act with trust in a Personal Mind which guides us through fortunes we cannot anticipate. We must be content to see no farther than He pleases to lift the curtain, and to accept the present good, the present and near duty.

And he, therefore, who lives engrossed by these worldly anxieties, tormented by fears, allured by ideal hopes, craving after unreal desires, can never reach the sound, healthy character of the Christian. "Fear hath torment."

Even in spiritual things it is not expedient to dwell too long on the imperfections of the present, to indulge too far in some dreams of future holiness. It creates a self-torturing mind, or a vague enthusiasm that destroys our practical duty.

In matters of the soul even "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Forgetting the things behind we must press toward the mark."

We think too little of the sad ingratitude, the fatal unbelief, to which this distemper of the heart often leads us. How constantly we distrust God! How constantly, while we profess a faith in a Providence that guides and keeps us, we act as if we really lived in a world where there was no foresight, no wisdom but our own.

There are some, even Christian men, whose piety consists in this incessant gloom at the present, and the outlook of the future. They

are ever borrowing sorrow. Nothing can wear a bright side for them, nothing can call out a smile of cheerful hope. "They observe the clouds and do not sow." They anticipate every trouble and look askance at every success; and are only happy when they are miserable, and make others so.

It is, I hold, as great a sin as any. It is a blasphemy against God. It is a virtual atheism. If my religion tells me anything it is that such a spirit is unbelief in God, unbelief in His benevolent and wise ordering of the world and of human life.

And when then, brethren, I see the effects of this distemper of worldly anxiety, such thousands tossed by this fever of hope and ague of despair, rich and poor thankless for their mercies, throwing life away on a dream, when I see how universal the disease in every employment, the pale-faced student, the driving tradesman, the Christian in his haunt of traffic changed from the Christian in the Church: when I see in this age of restless enterprise the numbers hasting to be rich, and renouncing too often all the solid habits of home, of quiet happiness, of social virtue, I can recognize the importance, I can estimate the real worth of this sage precept of my precious Saviour.

Here, in a word, is the whole art of Christian happiness. It asks no shrewd calculation. It is simply in making the most of the life which God gives. There is nothing in this Christian

morality which commands us to annihilate our desires. It teaches how to moderate them.

We cannot have the simple instinct that guides the eagle or the insect to his food. We cannot be careless as the child or the witless one who lives in the moment. But it is the purpose of our Christian faith to educate us into a manly strength, a settled calmness, truer, nobler than any instinct, which shall make us able to secure a more abiding happiness than theirs.

I may envy the babe's thoughtlessness of the morrow sometimes when plunged in the vortex of cares. But that child's untroubled mind only comes of his ignorance. A few years will make him a restless dreamer also.

I want the trust that comes of experience, that leans on an eternal hope, that is ceaseless and changeless because its foundations rest in Him who changeth not and erreth not and faileth not.

This is happiness. And it is the only happiness. What a power it has when we have learned at last to find our resources in the lot God has given us.

What blessings there are in daily life which I know nothing of until I have been forced to find them. I have built my air-castles of greatness and dreamed my years away. But if I have enjoyed the delights God has planted at my door, the daily gift of bread and health and pure fellowship, the worship of God, the daily

communion with Christ, the kindly offices to needing ones, the pleasures that leave no ache in my heart or my head, the Christian cares that bring no remorse, no weary disappointment—then I have what cannot be taken away.

If I have learned to give up my fretful hopes, to enjoy my work and my simple recreation, to leave to God the ordering of my future, its joy or its grief, its success or trial, then my life becomes a sound reality. Its least duties are lofty. Its commonest pleasures are refreshing, as a glass of spring water bubbling from its fountain, is better than choicest wine.

The secret of life is more than we dream. It is in a quiet content, in an honest living trust in the God of love, in a love of Him, and a love and keeping of His holy law.

And brethren, it is a happy experience for us if we learn this wisdom. We can only gain it as the fruit of Christian years. It very rarely comes in youth; for we must all pass through the season of unreal hopes. We must learn as the years go, how unwise it is to build in the air. We grow less prodigal of our affections, and come back as the old man comes after many wanderings, and sits down at the hearth that sheltered his boyhood, and finds the rest and the love of a few former friends better than all he has found in the wide world.

And happy are we if trial has taught us this. Happy, if disappointment and loss have taught it; if we have found perhaps through many

bitter lessons that our fondest plans have been failures, that we must accept life as God gives it and be more than patient, thankful and glad for the mercies which we can and shall find in a life of real duty.

But perhaps at the close of these thoughts I shall be told that it is folly to talk of this calmness of mind, this forgetfulness of worldly anxiety, to the man who has cares of business, sharp conflict with competitors, to engross the thought on the morrow; and that not one in a thousand can amidst the whirlpools of this mad, high pressure world, this daily life of anxious fretting, reach such a serene wisdom.

Nay! I have advanced no enthusiast's sentiment. It is the plain, practical wisdom of life. It may not, it should not, lead us to shun the cares, the responsibilities God has allotted in every sphere; but it may check the feverish spirit.

We hear these words of Jesus amid the din and strife of the world, and we recognize a voice that speaks to our hearts. We feel it as we stand sometimes among the quiet hills afar from the city, where the growing trees and the creatures of God preach in living parables. And in the presence of His still and mighty power there we wonder at our restless folly. He says to our worldly passions, "Peace, be still!"

It is His spirit of calm, of settled faith, we need in this our Christian life. If we have not found it we are far from the true character of

the disciple of Jesus. We but grope as the blind.

I value it as, next to godliness, one of the chief marks of the faith that animates the follower of Christ. I believe that he who has so lived will receive the not uncertain riches of the heart, will attain to a growing godliness. And I look upon it as a sound symptom of a flourishing piety, when as we ripen in years we have outlived the fever of youth and gained this settled trust, this contentment which lives in the day and accepts each coming gift of God as best and wisest. Such a man has already entered in spirit into some foretaste of the abiding peace of the sainted, redeemed in the Paradise of God.

REPENTANCE.

"Lord, let it alone this year also."

St. Luke XIII. 8.

We all know the parable. Its teaching is startling but clear. Each of us may learn its lessons for our own souls. God help us to read it aright, and for profit.

The first point upon which I would dwell is, that it is spoken of those who have become members of the family of Christ. It is not outcasts, not the scorners, not the impenitent and vile which are addressed here. It is those who have been welcomed as sons, who have held the Father's hand, who have been robed with the raiment of the saints.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard," declares the parable, "and he came and sought fruit thereon." God is the possessor of the vineyard, and it was the Jews, the elect but disobedient people as we know from the context, who were meant by the barren fig-tree.

And thus it is a lesson on the character of such as are members of the Christian Church. This is a point to be especially noted as it gives the real meaning to the whole. Too many preachers have misrepresented the truth here taught. Men have gained a discolored view of the lesson of the parable. They have seen it through a wrongly tinted lens.

The world has been divided by many a sermon into the two classes of penitent and impenitent. The latter are urged to conversion as if that were the whole duty, and as if to be converted men, members of the fold, were in itself to become fruitful trees.

But this is false to Scripture and false to reason. The sense is obvious. The fig-tree is in the vineyard. It has been planted and cared for. It needed the culture to grow, to live. But it was neglected. Therefore, it was fruitless. This is the real truth presented. It has consistency. It has power. It has a living reality.

But what a source of error in the other teaching. How many have been led through such an interpretation, to believe that some one great act of conviction and conversion is the main principle, the root, the essence, the real life of a sound piety; and that duty done, the man receives a seed which cannot wither. But what a stupendous fallacy is this! All have their obligation, in the Church or without it. But the conversion is not fruit. It is a leaf or twig, a fragment only of the full-grown piety.

Holiness is fruit. A life in full employment of the blessings of Christ's grace; a life in the fold, showing all evidence of a growth within the heart; this is the truth for us. Mistake not the parable, brethren. It means you and me, it means all of us who are baptized into the household of Christ, supplied by the means of daily renewal in His Word, His fellowship, in

His precious vineyard—the dear Church of Christ.

It means the obligation involved in such a gift. What is it? Fruit. Yes, that is what is demanded of us. Not a barren faith; not a momentary conversion, not raptures and moods but a real godliness, growth in our Christian character, growth in our visible duty, growth in our real work for Christ and men, growth to the right measure of our powers.

And here follows the next important point, that the results of life depend on this fruitfulness or barrenness of the Christian profession.

Hearken, brethren, to the sad language of the parable; "He sought fruit thereon and found none." Behold the strange contrast of profession and reality! A Christian life without fruit. A tree planted and watered by God's care, yet with no token of it. "Cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground?"

It is His sentence. Our consciences echo it. Our gifts, our privileges, our talents are not for our sloth or our ease. Our baptism was not to delude us with the idea of a certain salvation; our visible communion is not to lull us into the dream of a grace bestowed upon us, whether we aim to be holy, pure, godly in spirit like unto Christ.

Ah, no! they tell us rather that if we be chosen to bring forth fruit, and then neglect this individual responsibility, this culture of godliness, we must wither away. How these

words pierce within us as we look back on the past! "These three years I come seeking fruit, and find none!"

What is our record of three, of thirty, of fifty years? I trust few of us are barren fig-trees, yet how meagre the result when we look at ourselves by this real test of the Gospel. A little fruit hanging dwarfed and worm-eaten from the boughs, a life how often consumed with selfish aims, pampered by the luxurious idleness of the world, dwarfed by our vain earthly pleasures, withered by our neglect! What have we done compared with the all that we have left undone?

Yes, I hear one say, not in words, but his heart says it, "I have been a reputable member of the Church, prompt and constant at services, interested in its movements, liberal to its benevolences, devout in all duties, not given to the vices or vanities of the world."

I hear another say: "I have done as much as other men, as much for calls of need, for the calls of my different duties, as much as is possible in the midst of this driving, toiling life."

Alas! this is the fruit; this negative, self-satisfied religion that does no harm and as little good as it can without loss of reputation, without unpleasant inconvenience. Let us not cheat ourselves. Let us be honest. Let us tell ourselves the stern, solemn truth. Let us turn this magnifying glass of a self-scrutiny full upon our characters. Let us flash this calcium light of an earnest heart-search on our motives, aims,

labors; and anticipate His examinings who searches the ground of the heart.

Have you ever, my brother, meditated on that word of St. Paul, "the unfruitful works of darkness?" It has a power. There is a rich meaning in its hint. Fruit must have light. The rich and mellow side of the peach has drunk in the rays of the full sun. The grape blushes and sweetens on the rich cluster because it has basked in the warm sunbeams. The green, unripe, sour fruit is that which has grown in the shadow, which has nestled in the dark.

So is it with the fruit of life. If we have lived in the atmosphere, the warmth of a genuine Christian action, of a devout holiness, we have the sunny side of the graces, the mellow texture and flavor of a sound piety.

If we have lived in the dark retreat of our own selfish aims we have no fruit, our life is barren, or we yield only the green sour fruit of a half Christian existence.

What a thought is it! A life—the only one we have on earth—wasted utterly! Only a hot, dry Sahara, where there ought to have been a blooming garden, rich in its varied hues of a living luxuriance. Yes, a life wasted. It may be not in sins, not in open violation of a divine commandment; but one long negligence. From youth to age the golden opportunity, the rich talents, flung away upon some feeble aims which can yield nothing worthy for the great harvest day of God.

If there be a sadness beyond all others it is thus to strangle an existence designed to work out a noble end. And this sad folly is daily being wrought in these Christian homes that we know and frequent. Men and women in them all about us are living for self, for pleasure, for a perishing world. They pray and peruse the Word, and keep the moral law, and live a fair outward Christianity. But they are not seeking nor striving to live beyond self, to care for greater concerns than the round of the hearth and the shop, to be brothers and angels of mercy to needing brothers, to give thought and meditation to this undying soul, to Heaven, to God, with a mightier earnestness and a more solemn zeal than is the habit of the hosts about them.

But here we reach the blessed truth Christ gives us at last in the parable: "Let it alone this year also." We may thank God that His love still remains, even for His unprofitable servants.

Let us meditate on this. It is the vinedresser who pleads with the owner of the vineyard, but we are not to read it as if our Lord would convey the truth that because two persons are represented here there is some separation between the justice of the Father and the mercy of the Saviour. No, this is only the dress of the apologue. But the truth it reveals is that our God is at once a God of justice, yet of redeeming love.

What is that grace He bestows? It is given for repentance, for reformation, for a holier life. "Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it." What can more perfectly express the exhaustless grace of God.

As the gardener digs around the hard soil, loosens the roots, lets in the life-giving dews, so the Holy Ghost is ever seeking to break up the clods of our worldly habits, and soften our consciences that we may put out a new and living growth.

What is our life but a constant witness of this divine influence, what kindly warnings, what lessons of fear and love together, in sickness, in the breaking of selfish plans, in all the checkered history of the past; each year the same voice pleading, "this year, this year also."

But observe, my brethren, that grace is not forever. "If it bear fruit well; but if not then after that thou shalt cut it down."

Do not mistake the character of that truth. Not that there is any limit to the love of God, not that He is weary, or powerless to save, but our self-chosen barrenness is our ruin. We have wrought the destruction with our own hands. We have cut down the tree ourselves. Is not this the one saddest thought, brethren, at the close of our years, that we may reach the point where we have no longer power in our withered hearts and characters to put forth a new-blossoming resolve, a better hope, a germ of life?

We may say to our years: "Come back, come back," but they cannot return. They have vanished, they have left only their results. We sit down and reflect on them. Where are they—the early faith, the pure conscience, the glow of Christian hope? Is it I? Is it I?

And so let us today ponder the words of Christ. Ask yourself whether you have borne, are bearing, fruit for the Lord of this vineyard, for His keen eyes when He comes to seek it.

And do you say, "What have we but a poor meagre reckoning?" Still brethren, the word of grace remains. There is hope in thine end. Look not too sadly into the past years, but rather ask grace to redeem the time. Make with a cheerful heart your better resolves for the future and believe that God will accept your later vows. It is not for melancholy regret, not for despair, the Master spake the parable. We may take courage. No! if we ask our consciences not one can plead full duty; all confess neglect, poor effort. The best we can do is to do better.

God give us this true repentance not to be repented of—this which brings forth fruit, be it earlier or later, yet always fruit. No withering blossom, no mildewed, worm-eaten bud, no short-lived feeling, no hollow profession.

"Lord, let it alone this year also; and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, then after that—" Thank God, the rest of that sentence is yet unspoken!

PROCRASTINATION.

"Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee."

PROVERBS III: 28.

It is not the miser, not the ungenerous man who is here admonished. It is the man who postpones his duty. I would apply the precept to a spiritual purpose. It is procrastination in Christian service of which I would speak. The picture suggested in the proverb well presents it. It shows a man owing a debt or having an opportunity to do a good turn to a neighbor at a particular time, but withholding from whim or malice or indolence. There is a touch of nature we all understand. There is the full recognition of duty, but an unwillingness to do it when the moment arrives. It is dismissed with a pledge for the future. It is a precept that applies to every class of work. But I would consider it in its reference to Christian duty merely. My theme is then Procrastination in your obligations as a Christian man.

We all know the evil of a tardy action. We all know the power of promptness in things of the world. Punctuality, precision, are needful in social life, in business, to their health, to their soundness. And if applied to these, why not

just as truly to the matters of our piety? If this Christian life be a vocation, not a visionary's dream, not a mere vague sentiment, not a poor impulse; if yet more it be a business not for the few years of this uncertain life, but for those ceaseless ages we call Eternity; if the hereafter be long and this life but short; and if all our time is in the Lord's hand, not subject to our own whim or impulse, is it not the emptiest of follies to postpone our Christian duty? We must confess this to be true, each one of us. And yet we will allow pet delusions to lure us to the indulgence of this evil habit.

Let us consider these self-deceivings and their results. May God's blessed Spirit aid our thoughts. It is not open unbelievers, not the men surrendered to the vices of a naughty world of whom I would speak. It is of those who have some purpose, some desire to hear God's voice and obey. But it is not done. It is deferred year by year, yea, until the grey hair and the tottering step come.

And what, I ask, is the cause of such neglect? The reason too often is the unwillingness to do a duty now; and this grows stealthily but surely to be an overmastering habit. This is the real cause, but like all other vices it puts on fair disguises, it masks itself in some rich costume, and so the real motive is concealed from our own hearts. Let us examine some of these disguises. They are very specious. They have the very sophistry of a Jesuit in them. One is

the grave responsibility of a Christian life. We should not, says the pleader, assume these vows of a religious life without a solemn, searching preparation: we should wait until we feel that we can succeed in achieving all our duty fully. A false, popular teaching too often feeds this procrastinating notion. It teaches that the renewing of the soul is the work of God's spirit, which is true. But it also instructs the man to wait for some particular awakening, some special mysterious visiting of the Holy Ghost. But what a delusion is this. Is it an evidence of our sense of the importance of piety when we delay embracing it? Would we not rather, as in all other matters, reason that if the task of the Christian life be long and great it should be entered upon at the earliest moment of life, when powers are strong, when vigor is fresh, when we have our best life? Is the allotted span of a man's years, his three score and ten or his four score, too long for the training and perfecting of a Christian character? Will any patriarch say that his age is too great for the true growth of his piety? The preparation Christ asks of us is not emotion, not a spiritual convulsion, not the ecstacy or transport of a diseased or an excitable imagination. He loves best the sober and sincere act of duty. We receive His Spirit as we use His gifts. They are the channels, as the water of Jordan was the instrument of Naaman's miraculous cleansing. It is not the waiting *for* God that His word

commands; it is the waiting *on* God. We must not expect His Spirit to serve us except as we labor to serve Him first. No! this delusive fear, my halting friends, this assumed reverence may be the guise only in which your own unwillingness masks itself; and your procrastination shall make you, not more, but less prepared for duty, more feeble, more wavering, and at last incapable of any action, as the paralysis passes, limb by limb, to the heart.

There is another motive of delay. We postpone because we would do our Christian duty better in the future. What a pleasing fiction it is! It saves conscience its hardest twinge. We flatter ourselves on our sincerity. And while we live for the world we at the same time dream of what saints we will be on the morrow. But is not this a poor delusion in any affairs of the world? This promising without immediate action, will it answer for the concerns of the daily life? Is it less necessary in Heavenly things? Our religion asks of us the performance of a plain duty. It is no impossible task, no rigid labor which taxes endurance or power beyond their ability. Any may perform it fully. If we neglect it when it can be done that neglect is the proof of unwillingness. Instead of a better future it has the promise of a worse. The act of delay passes into a habit. It is the most difficult disposition to conquer. Tomorrow! What is tomorrow? It is an imaginary coinage of the brain, it is the horizon that lies only in

the eye, it is a will-o'-the-wisp that flees uncaught before us over the marsh; for it has no reality. There is only today: only this hour: only the present fleeting instant. It only has the opportunity, it is in the power of the hand. What force, what depth of meaning in that verse of the wise man which precedes our text: "Withhold not good when it is in the power of thy hand."

I hold in my hand a slender wire. I move it and that slight motion sets at work a magnetic power that runs across a continent, or leaps from New World to Old. It is in my hand. I have opportunities each moment, but I cannot keep them. They flee as the instant of time flees, both together to the sepulchre of the past, from which there is never a resurrection.

Today I am called to some service for one in need, a diseased, a starving man. Now is my opportunity. I postpone it. Tomorrow he is dead. And, alas, my opportunity is dead, too. Today I am to start forth on a voyage across the sea to settle important affairs. I am too late, and by the next mail I am ruined.

No, my brother, this we must learn in spiritual as in secular concerns, that what is duty should be speedily, immediately, fully done, that whatsoever the hand finds to do must be done with the might. We may be prudent, we may resolve calmly, but when we know a duty, any procrastination so far from wisdom is the very height of folly. Nothing comes of nothing; but the most imperfect duty sincerely done, is

the stepping-stone to the future. It has the power of a growth, of a new habit, of a duty done. It has the smile and the benediction of an approving God, our Master.

I have endeavored to present this theme in its bearing on the beginning of a holy life. It has equal reference to every stage of its growth, to all its actions. This tardiness in duty is the vice of vices. It cripples the piety more than all else. We flatter ourselves with the dream while we are not working, that at any rate we are sincere. Our life is passed in vague visions of doing for the by-and-by, in unripe plans of action never matured. But the swift years wait not for us and at last we wake up in age or on a bed of death and find our life to be a dismal failure.

Consider its effects on our character. How does this habit of delay hinder our personal growth in the steadfast virtues of our religion! Who of us has not had reason to mourn over the fruitless wishes of life, the poor, vague dreams of a sounder living that never came to be a reality? There is not one here who does not determine at times to be more diligent, more unworldly, more punctual in habit, more faithful to his daily duties. But the resolutions vanish. They are like the bubbles on the wave-top, only half a sphere and so perishing at the first strain on their strength. We will wait a little longer, and so our Bibles lie with unturned pages, our ways unchanged, our heart the same

or worse, and at the end of thirty or forty years what do we see but the same unaltered or half-altered character, the same faults of disposition, the same weak indulgence of the impulses, the same love of money or pleasure, the same fickle, fitful, vacillating record of an aimless, wasted, worthless life.

And why is all this? Simply because we said: "Tomorrow" to a plain duty, and when tomorrow came it was easier to say it again, because we dared not take the step to make us wholly and unreservedly followers of Christ. Thus we lost the strength which the consecration gives. We had no resolved will, no firm, strong principle in our religious action, and we have not had it in our daily life of temptations and struggles and cares. Thus with all the privileges of a Christian communion around us we have remained these feeble, fitful, half-matured disciples, settled procrastinators, without point, without firm nerve, without the determined inflexible will that graces the man full-grown in the stature of Christianity. Such is the result of this one failing on the personal character. Take heed, ye professors of a Christian piety that this be not your trait, your stumbling block, your rock of shipwreck.

What again does this habit do to dwarf the results of our Christian labor? The cause of our Master is before us: it demands our earnest zeal, our personal work. That cause cannot be delayed, but the great system of God's spiritual

agencies moves forward as the planet in its orbit, as the growth of the tree, without sleep or fitful motion. We are in the very vortex of golden opportunities for good. The power is in our hand, but we delay. We are not ready to work. We hope to act in the future. Alas! the occasion waits not for us any more than does the rolling tide or the sinking sun at evening. The opportunity fades away, and with it the future also.

Who of us does not know this fact in his experience? We have our heart-searchings at times regarding the sins of commission, but do we think of the monster wrong that lies coiled in mere omission? Are not these really the more numerous, the more weighty in our Christian life? See there the secret of the poverty of our influence. This man is timid and leaves to others what he knows to be his duty; that man is a dreamy Christian, ever busy with theories of what ought to be done, and doing nothing. And there are some to whom duty is always sudden, always half an hour late, at the depot just as the train rolls away, at the church just when the service is half through, at the house of mourning as the funeral passes from the door, visiting the sick friend just after the pulse has ceased to throb; persons who live thus for years and are surprised at last when death comes and finds them with their affairs not quite ready. Here is the reason why the Church of Christ droops in her best enterprises.

It is because her friends are asleep. Because they halt and wait for God to do His work, while they give their energies to all other objects save the highest; while they groan over the increase of evil, and forget that what our Master asks is not their pious regrets, not their holy horror and satire of the wrong, not even their sincere mourning and lamentations for the growth of wickedness. But he asks their vigorous, prompt, timely action, their strong effort to stem the tide of evil.

"Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee."

Thus then dwell on this proverb. It calls you to remembrance of your obligations, to prompt doing of your clear work as soldiers of Christ. Think of it as one who knows what is the purpose of your life, and who realizes its worth in the experience of its loss. Yes, brethren, how in the press of care, in the littleness of our results, in the slowness of our march, in the vacillations from the tropic to the pole of our fervor, the word of St. Paul comes upon us, "the time is short": how at times it weighs us down with fear and bitter depression. But let us not so listen to it. No doubt, no discouragement, no delay; nay, rather let it wake us the more to duty; let it assure us that only our own fear is our failure. That if we act, act now, act in trust on the promises of our Master, it can never be and shall never be in vain. "Therefore,

my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

UNCHARITABLENESS.

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

St. Matthew VII. 2.

A great principle is set forth in the text. It is one of those wise revealings of the heart of man; one of those strange barings of it to its very core, that make us stand in amazement at the mysterious knowledge of the passions, motives, palpitations of men that it reveals in the speaker. It tells us if no external testimony bore witness to it that He who uttered the precept could be no less than divine.

It is no mere superficial scrutiny of the wrong of the harsh judgments of our fellow-men we so often indulge in. He goes deeper. He traces it to its root in ourselves. By the homely illustration of one observing a mote, the smallest possible speck, in the eye of another, while he is unconscious of a beam, some far greater obstacle to vision, in his own, he puts the subject practically.

In this same manner I would present the theme for your consideration this morning. May the blessed Spirit grant us grace to learn its important teachings of duty well.

This precept of the blessed Saviour is founded

upon a universal human fact. It is that our own disposition, personal standard of motive and action give chiefly the tone to our judgment of others' deeds.

It is only necessary to trace out the Saviour's illustration to see the truth of this. As the eye is perfect or imperfect, objects appear one way or another. The man who had been blind, in his partially restored state, saw men as trees walking.

Some people see no distinction between certain colors. The artist on his canvas often gives you a truer idea of the exact proportion existing between different objects than you can determine by the testimony of your own sight.

The jaundiced eye sees all objects yellow-hued. The near-sighted eye discovers no sharp outline in the distant object, but a hazy, blurred, indefinite thing. Indeed, we behold nothing, with these imperfect natures that clothe us, as it actually is, but as it appears to us.

So, too, in matters that demand the intellectual effort, the same principle is manifest. The child commencing the alphabet has no comprehension of the philosophy of language or the power of combining those twenty-six letters to express every idea that the human brain has ever harbored.

The savage who drones out his weird war-song knows naught of the power which gave a Mozart or a Haydn supremacy over the emotions of a throng of men.

Our own poor vision is the measure by which we gauge everything, not the infallible standards of Him of perfect faculties, the man Christ Jesus.

And it is precisely so with our moral eyesight. Only we have less realization of its imperfectness. You generally know of your defective vision, of the cataract, or film or weakness that obscures your view; of your lacking knowledge, your elementary accomplishments, your weak grasp of the sciences, or your utter ignorance. But the last thing that any man suspects is his moral judgment.

He is a rarity in this world of self-assured men who admits the conclusions of his logic regarding others to be wrong. There is too much self-idolatry, too much will-worship in this poor human nature for that.

We judge then the dispositions and works of men by our own temperaments and motives and labors. We see them decked in raiment borrowed from our own wardrobe. We behold our own portraits reflected in them. Men as we see them, are not as *they* are, but as *we* are.

It is as impossible for any man to rise above his own character, as for the fountain to send its jet above the level of the aqueduct from whence it flows. The bad cannot see as the good see. "The natural man perceiveth not the things of God, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned."

The Indian might as well endeavor to parse

Sanscrit, or the babe to measure the orbit of the sun. The true Christian only, whose soul is pure, whose every palpitation is unselfish, whose each prejudice is uprooted and cast out, whose every passion is strangled and banished from the soul; he, he alone can know others aright. Of the perfect Jesus only, of all that have walked the earth, could it be truly recorded that "He knew what was in man."

But let this character have any twist, any wrong bend in it, and we get only an oblique view of our neighbor. The film or jaundice, or cast, distorts the opinion, and we are uncharitable. And so the degree of the error will vary with the man.

There may be the last stage of moral blindness, when all is dark within, and all truth, all virtue seems untrue because we ourselves are false. It may be the ultra Parisian skepticism which believes no generosity, sneers at all self-sacrifice, doubts all modesty and chastity, and ignores every piety.

There may be a partial obscurity, so that we see all characters in the color of our own favorite vice. There may be a distortion of the moral sight so that we read only one side of others. And in proportion to the size of the bosom-vice in ourselves, so will be the greatness or littleness of the blemish in others. Our individual sin is the magnifying-glass by which we enlarge the area of a neighbor's obliquity. The larger our own beam the quicker our sense of a brother's mote.

Here, then, dear brethren, is the root of uncharitableness. It is self-ignorance. A man clings to a vice of his own, and so loves to find one in others. Unconscious of his own bondage he is blinded to its controlling motive, and sees a love of virtue in the criticism with which he lashes his neighbor's fault.

Ah! it gives us a sad picture of this weak humanity of ours. But it may not be an unprofitable employment to trace out some of the windings of such a wrong spirit.

I assert first that your harsh judgment of another springs from a cherished fault which you thus conceal from yourself. You see this truth exhibited in a thousand diverse costumes as you sweep your eye over the changing passions that master men.

Look at the ambitious politician whose one aim is the highest prize in the public gift. No trick too cunning for his use; no friend too dear to be sacrificed; no strategy too dishonest by which to achieve his end. His heart sees his own image at every turn: he finds no magnanimity in any brother-man; believes patriotism a myth; contemplates friendship as a convenience, views honesty only as a good policy.

Talk not to him of principle; it is a romance, or a whim as variable as the winds. Hint not of unselfish benevolence, it is but an idle dream, or a pious fiction.

So, too, look at the sensual man, whose purity has departed. He esteems all as lustful

as himself, sees corruption lurking in the recesses of every heart, and satirizes social chastity as a flimsy cheat.

The pure soul loves to think that there is virtue and truth in a neighbor's heart, because it feels them in its own. It suspects with pain; it bears, believes, hopes all things. Better the spirit that sees the still beating virtue, though under a soiled robe, than that which looks only at the raiment and ignores the warming heart that it covers.

Better to suffer for your belief in human virtue than to develop into the skeptical cynic, who, because he himself has been defrauded and has learned to defraud, concludes that there is no goodness on the earth.

It is an oft-repeated picture of human life that each man is the framer of his own happiness or unhappiness; that it is not his condition but his own spirit which determines the one or the other. One man's poverty will transform him into the patient, loving man of faith; another's will convert him into the restless, querulous cynic.

I have seen the strong man snatched from the midst of activities and enterprises, in the very zenith of his success, when all had reached the flood-tide of promise, laid helpless and weak upon the sick bed. It was disappointment, it was a severe shock to the progress of his career, reverses seemed to threaten. But amid it all there was the manifestation of the cheerful

confidence, the quiet trust which said in its meekness and in its resigned, uplifted heart, with a greater emphasis than words could give: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemed to Him good."

I have seen the same trials bowing another to the dust; developing naught but the soured, fretful, bitter complainer, inveighing against men and fate, and transforming life into a penance rather than a holy-tide for cheerful, sacred labor.

There is enough of real evil without making it worse by our personal spleen. Ah! the Christian cheerfulness which is true, will ever note a sunbeam playing on the opposite side of the cloud; find a refreshing rill out in the desert waste; sing its song in the night.

It is a false view of the Christian life, when a man sits down melancholy at the foot of his private griefs, brooding over dark views of life; forgetting the mercies of God, and calling that piety which is only his own sour selfishness.

It is the fault of many a Christian system of today. Some of our modern teachings are but reflections of old Zeno, or a Roman cynic's philosophy of the past. Its chief element is bitter criticism, its prominent virtue childish fault-finding. As if our own virtue were helped on by a keen sense of a brother's vices. As if we could better pull out our own beam by having a strong indignation at another's mote.

And now we are pointed to another side of

this vice of uncharitableness as it springs from a false piety. And this is its most repulsive form. It covers a greater sin with a good name and wraps holy vestments about a worse vice as it clasps it to its own bosom.

The holier a man is the more intense will be his consciousness of his own infirmity. He will be the closer critic of his personal weakness. The less impatient censor of his neighbor's shortcomings the nearer he approaches sainthood.

It is a proud Pharisaism which loves to exhibit its higher sanctity by unveiling another's wrong-doing. But it is as cold an uncharitableness as that of the worshipper in the temple courts who recited the list of his virtues and thanked his God that he was better than his more immoral neighbor.

It is an oft-manifested spirit. The benevolent Judas who robbed the Apostles' treasury and sold his Master for a price, is warm with holy indignation at the waste of a box of ointment. The proud wearer of the broad phylactery is outraged because the Saviour stoops to break bread at Zaccheus' board. A weeping Magdalen finds no favor or countenance from the punctilious but hard Pharisee.

It is the concealed vice putting on the pious garb and hiding its own wrong by the bitter denunciation of the more open sin; just as the corrupt ecclesiastic rises from his gaming-table to don the vestments of the Altar and denounce Church delinquents.

We abhor such a spirit. We feel its hollowness.

Ah! our holiness, if it be real, will not permit us to look in scorn from our moral height upon the wounded brother. It is not the priest's indifference, nor the Levite's coldness that will characterize our conduct. But these hearts that have felt the pulse of their own passions, frailties and wrong, will tender him the good Samaritan's ministries, lifting him up, bearing him away to refuge, taking care of him.

But in frequent ways this uncharitable spirit manifests itself. How often do we single out certain sins by which we are not ourselves tempted, and while we lavish upon these our censure we easily pass by our own darling vice or pet fault.

Many modern reformers exhibit this tone in their self-delegated labors. The advocate of total abstinence is intemperate in his denunciations of those who do not hold his theory, and sees in them an utter barrenness of virtue. The victim of the wine-cup on the other hand denounces the temperance reformer as harsh, conceited, and an enthusiast.

Ah! he who would reform others must begin at his own heart. The old proverb of the Jews applies well to the Christian in these latter days: "Physician, heal thyself."

This character must be disciplined, well-knit, made strong and muscular, before it can guide, teach, or build up, the wrong-doer. Else

our benevolence will be only self-conceit; our one-sided good will do a greater harm.

And, too, what is more common than to look through the personal spy-glass, and magnify the little faults that are external, into great sins, and so pass by the deeper sins of the heart? Like the man trying to remove the difficulty by external appliances to the skin, when the root of the evil lies in the blood; like the mower putting in the sickle among the weeds and not tearing out the underlying roots.

But finally, there is a form of uncharitableness to which even the best are subject. This is our indiscriminate judgment. What does the Christian, shut in from the temptings and tossings of the outer world in the seclusion of his home, at his books of theology, his researches in science, amid his wealthy leisure, away from the intrigues of the market, the exchange, the caucus—what does he know of the temptations of trade, of politics, of the social whirlpool? No more than the boy with his toy ship on the pond at his father's door, knows of the tempests and billows sweeping over the ocean, that leave the stout ship a battered, dismantled wreck.

Ah! no man who has been tempted (and who has not?) can judge the tempted without tenderness. Let us rebuke vice, denounce wrong, judge evil always in the strong, unceasing remembrance that we, too, must be judged.

Ah, brethren, it is a solemn lesson that our text teaches. We learn the duty of self-knowledge

the absolute need of asking the grace of God through His Son, to test ourselves, our own prejudices, passions, weaknesses. We learn the overwhelming importance of gaining His blessed aid to cast the beam from our own eyes before we presume to pull out the mote of a brother.

If in a moment of bitterness you have been disposed to magnify an injury; if in the daily world of imperfect men you have come to entertain the skeptic's and scoffer's spirit toward human nature; if you have been prone to judge without tenderness, to allow nothing for weakness or honest error, to shut the gate of mercy on the penitent—go home to your own heart, sit down alone with your own sins, frailties, and prejudices, and you must rise from the scrutiny a kinder, more compassionate man.

Oh, my soul! ever remember that a day is coming when all, the saint and the sinner, the pure and the outcast, the weak, and the weeping Magdalen, and the extortionate publican, and the riotous prodigal shall be summoned before the Judge, who reads each one's secret history, knows their weaknesses, temptings, strugglings, tears, and who judges with tender mercy and compassionate love; when, too, each must confess his own short-comings, show his own contrition, and only through the mercy of a dear Saviour gain pardon and salvation.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

"And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

St. Luke XVI. 8.

This parable of the Unjust Steward is strangest of all that dropped from the Saviour's loving and wise lips. The human shrewdness, the cunning and the guile which in it seem to be applauded and recommended by the pure Son of God, appear out of harmony with all other of His teachings. And when, at the close, we are advised to "make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," we read it in wonder and marvel, if these be the words of Him that uttered the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of The Sower, The Prodigal Son, and the Pearl of Great Price. All evidence shows that they are the words of Jesus of Nazareth, and yet I must say unreservedly and freely that there are points in the parable which no expositor that I have read satisfactorily explains. It is without doubt preëminently one of the most difficult of our adorable Master's speeches. And yet the whole drift of the parable shows a wise teaching for us as Christian stewards of the holy God, as servants who are custodians of a higher good

than wheat and oil—even of durable riches and righteousness.

Examine the story and you soon see its wise aim. The bailiff of a vast Oriental estate, a man whose office was to receive the rents of the husbandmen employed in the wealthy proprietor's service, is detected in fraud. When his wrong-doing is known the prospect of an expulsion from his post threatens him. With consummate shrewdness and speedy haste he calls all the tenants together, cancels their debts at a large discount, and so contrives to buy their good-will. It is a specimen of what would be called in modern days a prudent and sharp business policy.

Where is the point of the story? Not surely in the dishonesty of the steward. We are told that "the lord" commended him because he had done wisely. It is important to note that it is not our Lord, but "the lord," the proprietor himself. The word commended does not exactly express the real meaning here. He certainly could not lavish much praise on his tricky steward, but, as we sometimes do, when we are handsomely cheated, he acknowledged the keen worldly cunning of the man.

And here follows the criticism of our Master: "I say unto you that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Is not the meaning obvious? The selfish and the dishonest, the mere men of the world, show a prudence, a crafty wisdom in their

own affairs, far beyond those which the sincere, the good in heart, exhibit in their spiritual concerns. They are wiser for a time than the Christian is for eternity. The zeal, the study, the labor, men expend on fleeting matters of earth are worthy our imitation in the grander and more solid things of the world to come.

And here He adds the closing counsel: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations." There is a certain vagueness in the phrase, a peculiar haze enveloping the speech that I find it difficult to pierce. But I can have no possible doubt as to the real idea presented. Of course, it does not mean that we are to use a selfish craft, that we are to be subtle, dishonest Jesuits for religious ends. Nor does it mean that we are to gain Heaven by shrewd calculation. But the principle put forth is this: show the same prudent forethought, the same fitting of means to ends, the same care and enterprise, in securing the unfailing results of a Christian life that others do for the unrighteous mammon, for the poor wealth of this fading life.

We can, brethren, on a very slight acquaintance with men as they are, recognize this character—so keenly sketched in the steward—and know its influence. Practical skill, the knowledge of human nature, the talent that can use it for its own purpose—this is the ruling, the admired virtue in the world. Its morality is

summed up in one word—*Success*. Without it, genius and learning are like a man without a hand. You see it on the larger scale in the commanding intellect and will that can hold the helm of Empire, can guide Senates or take the largest prizes of wealth. And how often in common life you find the man of inferior native gifts who takes precedence of the wise and good by this mere force of a shrewd craft. Men are they whose moral character is known to all —unscrupulous in overreaching, fraud, or bribery—yet, in spite of all, men who can make themselves feared, men who can play the despot over corporations and force not only silence but a sort of shameful, cringing homage from thousands who are themselves unspotted. Tact rules the market-place and the drawing-room.

Now, while this character is thoroughly despicable and hateful, there is an element in it not to be passed over. The selfish spirit is evil. The cunning is contemptible. But the knowledge of mankind is a power. The wise prudence, the far-seeing eye, the shrewdness that plans discreetly for the future, a keen sagacity, skill that is energetic and active—these are genuine worthy traits, these are righteous powers. The man in the world should keep the innocent purity of a childlike heart; but in a social mass so corrupt and keen as is this world we live in, we need to outgrow the child's credulity, his visionary notions of men and of life—the enthusiasm that runs mad after impractical aims.

We will not be disappointed when we see the dark veins running through the snowy marble; we shall look for flaws in the richest temple; we shall not expect angels in these fallen men. This is the ripe wisdom the Apostle commands; "In malice be ye children, in understanding be men." To the pure Apostles the pure Saviour gave direction, "Be ye harmless as doves"—but too, "be ye wise as serpents."

But if this be true in the conduct of affairs in everyday life, is this practical sense not of more worth in our religion? Surely there is none of the objects we pursue in this world, however hard of attainment, that needs more this foresight of a sagacious mind or a thorough skill or well-directed energy than the business of our Christian calling. The knowledge of any science is not more momentous than the truth of God. The habits of a true piety are not gained without a long and earnest discipline. It is for our real life—this daily life of temptations and trials amidst men, amidst the affairs of the household and the driving world, that we want our Christianity. Religion is a business in the fullest sense of the word. What merchant ever wrought his aims and devices for the future with such skill, such discretion as is required for the gain of godliness? A Christian man should have a knowledge of mankind as keen as that of the sharpest man of the world. He should not be unconscious of society's shams and its realities, its complex motives, its endless

crooked deceits; and with this—nay, before this, he should have a knowledge of himself—his besetting faults, his pet weaknesses, his personal needs. He must search for holiness, as for hid treasures. He must concentrate all his powers on this supreme and unselfish aim. What clear vision, what patience, what resolved courage, what calculation of means to ends, what steady growth from small beginnings, what watchful skill, what constant use of all the aids of God's Holy Spirit must work together for the right success of a Christian life! I know of nothing where all those qualities which give genuine power in the world of men are so needed as in the conduct of our religion.

Yet here is it that the children of this generation are wiser than the children of light. It is the unhappy fact that there is nothing more rare than to find the practical sense, the ripe discretion, the acquaintance with self and human nature, the sound method of action that we prize elsewhere, in a Christian character. What is the reason? I think the answer plain. It is because our religion is concerned with matters above the world, and therefore we forget that it has aught to do with any of the principles or methods of human life. We think and feel and act in it as we should never do in any other sphere. We should call that exceeding folly in our trade or our social conduct which passes for wisdom and devout feeling.

Consider, I entreat you, my brethren, how

often we perplex ourselves with difficult questions of Christian belief, and allow our doubts to disturb us in regard to the simplest duty, when in real life we should act as sensible, straightforward men. If the seaman would not set forth on his voyage until he had learned the complete science of the stars; if any of us would not plant a tree or lift a finger till he had settled the mystery how God works in Nature, we should call it absurdity. Yet how many puzzle themselves about the subtle points, the mysteries of their religion—their riddles of regeneration and divine Grace, of election and predestination—and do not take the first step in clear, simple, Christian duty. What utterly, unintelligible notions we are ready to accept as divine truth which we should reject in all other knowledge! What foolish speculations we call faith instead of the plain, practical Gospel of our Lord.

Or consider it in regard to our methods of religious action. Look at the Christian of the emotional type. He knows well enough in his ordinary business that his success depends on steady rule, a working, careful system of action. He has his punctual hours, his exact accounts: he invests his capital with care and reckons with patience the annual profits: but he seems to suppose that a Christian piety can live and grow without any training at all. He makes it a sickly fancy. It withers away and he mourns over his spiritual coldness. Is not the fruit a natural one? Can he expect any other?

Look at another type of the morbid disciple. His religion is sincere; but it is just as entirely separated from a sound or healthy character. It is shut up within a round of formal duties; it is not carried into his everyday world of the house and shop and social circle. In all else he is a man of large spirit and well-balanced judgment; but here he is narrow and unwise—a visionary—and so he makes all religion repulsive.

But I cannot exhaust the description. What excellent Christians who seem to live in a little world of their own imaginations and never know anything of the ideas or temptations or habits of others beyond it! What lack in the character—as you so often find it—of the robust common-sense, the usages and habits of any save their select circle.

How frequent this want of practical wisdom in the sphere of Christian benevolence! What amiable persons who, in their plans of mission-work, of charity, squander thousands with less prudence than a child, and spend their enthusiasm on projects sure of failure! There are some, nay, many godly people who seem to think that nearest to devout feeling which is most removed from ordinary sense and discretion. I do not wonder at all that so many keen men of the world look on a Christian character as weak, as defective in the serviceable qualities of life. They judge it by a false standard indeed. They are apt to overlook the noble traits—the faith, the sincerity, the purity—that are not

found in the common training of society: but we could wish there were fewer who make their religion a reproach.

When we have so read the parable of the Steward its meaning comes to us with another strangeness, than at first. Yes! I am not filled with half the wonder when I regard the world itself—its devotees of gold and silver, its faithful stewards of the mammon of unrighteousness —as I am when I regard the child of light, forgetful of his duties, squandering his divine riches without understanding.

The voice of the world speaks to us in that unjust steward. Its selfish sagacity shames our neglect, its thrift in the service of other gods rebukes our inefficiency in the service of Christ.

Permit me to speak with plain truthfulness to you who are just entering on the active business of life. I beseech you to remember that our religion is a business. If you know that you are to grow in wisdom and in holy graces, if you desire to be the children of light, to have the wealth that is in the pure conscience, the real service of God then learn at the outset what it demands of you. Learn that a Christian life is something more than a chance feeling, than a mere sentiment, than a fitful impulse. It wants a positive and defined purpose; it wants a solemn choice of your duty; it wants the most intelligent belief and the heartiest action. It must grow step by step, as all

your knowledge grows, as your fortune grows, as your earthly success grows—by a patient, steady fidelity.

Believe it, my young friends, that no poor notion of a religion to be gotten by-and-by in some spasmodic excitement, a religion which shall save your soul after your years have been squandered on vice or folly, is wisdom.

I am not urging you to a life of gloomy seclusion. I speak of that wisdom which is pleasantness and peace. If it be sober truth in all else, I count it far more so here, that to throw away our best powers on mere selfish pleasure, on false aims, only, at last, to have an aching heart, a bitter repentance and the poor, ghostly chance of a better life is indeed a spendthrift folly. You may come back, a prodigal, to your Father's home, but the memory of the years of wrong, the misspent youth, and the husks of remorse and shame leaves a scar forever.

Learn that a simple faith, a pure heart, a growing habit of Christian duty, are the only happiness that have no disappointment. Alas! how short-sighted our best sagacity here! What poor economy that has not learned that godliness is gain! I pray you learn this stewardship of spiritual things. If our religion be profitable for the life to come it is profitable for that which is.

There is a wisdom more short-sighted than that of the ant who stores in Summer for the Winter's supply. It is the stewardship that

secures the lands and houses here and forgets that it must build the "everlasting habitations" in the ground of a Christian mind and heart.

PARENTAL OBLIGATION.

"And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord."

St. Luke II. 22.

There is no pomp in the scene which comes before our sight here. It was a simple ordinance and a very ancient one. It is a lowly company that enters the Temple. A humble peasant woman of Nazareth approaches to return thanks for her first-born son. She bears the prescribed offering, too—not the aristocrat's unblemished lamb, but that less costly gift—the pair of turtle-doves.

Yet it was a fitting image of Mary's tender, trusting piety. Few gather about her on the glad occasion; simply grey-haired but holy old Simeon and one poor prophetess, a pensioner of the Temple. That careless throng of rich and learned, of pharisee and rabbi, heeded not the humble group clustered reverently near the Altar on that day. Had they but Simeon's knowledge, or pure Anna's prayerful experience, they would gather lowly at the feet of that Child, praising the Lord Jehovah, and worshipping in loving adoration His one dear Son, come into the lost world to save it forever. How changed

is that scene to us who read of it after the flight of so many centuries.

But we would turn our eyes not upon the holy Babe only, but also upon the ceremony which drew Him to the temple. It was a rite practiced by the command of Moses himself. It signified that each first-born son was consecrated in infancy as holy before God. It was not then a mere meaningless form. It typified a great solemn truth and privilege.

Its main purpose was to impress on every parent that he and his house had obligation to serve the Lord. And thus the first-born son was selected, not because the blessing was to be conferred on him only, but because in all such primitive societies the eldest son represented the household, the race, as he was always successor to the patriarchal rank and influence. The principle is presented in those closing words of Jacob's pilgrimage "Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might and the beginning of my strength."

The law of primogeniture has its origin in that early and natural social order. It was hence the noblest offering of a Hebrew parent. It was not alone his child, but the first-born of his herd and of his flock, that he recognized as the only fitting offering for the high God.

This then is the grand feature of that old religion. It was a household religion. The family idea was one most precious to them. It was recognized as ordained of God. The child was a son of God in a more than natural sense.

He was to be trained from that hour in which he was presented in the Temple with the sense that he was an offering to God, covenanted, consecrated, even as any holy vessel for the sanctuary, holy to the Lord.

All there was of reverence, of pure habit, of living religion was linked to this truth. In the consciousness of this holy responsibility the Hebrew brought up his children in the worship of God, in the early study of the Divine Word, in reverent honor of the Law.

Reverence of parents was joined with reverence of God. Hence it was that in all those years of corruption and decay the essence of that religion still clung to the people. Domestic fidelity, parental and filial love, purity of household discipline, those fragrant virtues that sweetened the national life and gave it place and honor and power, and kept them pure amid the paganism that girdled them.

This then is the meaning of this ceremony to us of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It gives us sweet memories of our dear Lord's infancy, and it tells us of our divine sonship in the family of our Father. And if there be a feature which above all others is manifest in the religion of Jesus Christ, it is this of the knitting of its faith and worship with the life of the household.

It began as a family bond. Its first Church organizations were in the private homes of its members. "The Apostles brake bread from

house to house." So, as it silently grew, the Church of the first age began to nestle within its folds not the adult convert alone, but whole families, and so the baptismal privilege was extended to children and dear babes in Christ.

If, instead of artificial theories concerning it, we would enter into the spirit of that earlier time, where faith and love were not fettered with theological abstractions, we would soon learn the meaning and blessing of that precious sacrament of Baptism. To them it was the act of regeneration. That meant a change of condition, which was the reward of the faith and obedience that prompted the spirit thus to come to Christ.

It was to them a passing out of the world and its doom, into the hope and privilege of the family of God. It was like this presentation of Christ in the Temple; it was the dedication of the babe at its dawn of life to his Father in Heaven. This was its new birth, its adoption into a better than the earthly household—the family of Christ.

Nor was this restricted to a single act. It was not the deed of an instant. But it typified the whole life of growing knowledge and piety. And so that early Christianity, had the tendency to lead the parent to recognize the need of linking the growth in piety with the training, the obligations, the affections of home.

The Christian parent was to recognize that he was called to be a priest in his own home;

that his family altar was to be reared there, that his offspring were to receive a holy nurture; that they were not his solely but God's likewise. The worship of the gathered congregation, though essential, though vital to the soul's life, was not the preëminent or the sole channel of piety. It was to be blended with the daily service of home, with the sweet graces and pure words and deeds of childhood, the toil of manhood, and the peace of age.

I would then present this truth as one of supreme importance. Jesus, the little one, offered in the Temple, as our text proclaims, is the type of your relationship to Christ, in your own Christian households.

How much more solemn are the accountabilities which the worldly bonds impose! You learn that you are not only bound to your children by bonds of affection, to minister to the body, to train their minds for their posts of duty—but to nurture them for the nobler life of the soul, for pure action, and devout faith and godliness. Yes! and we learn—a truth too many are prone to forget—how absolutely, how intimately, this life of piety, this whole religious career of a Christian man, is knit in with the culture of home.

What thoughtful parent has ever brought hither such a new-born, helpless, yet immortal creature and not felt some of the same deep concern with which Mary looked on the face of her infant Son as she offered Him before the

Temple's Altar. A wistful forecast into the future, a mysterious marveling, a mingling hope and fear, as the eye looked far into the dim oncoming years, and tried to spell out the history of this half-opened bud of promise.

Ah, sad is it if that parental instinct be only a passing thought, a poor transient emotion; if you do no more than the bird that rears its young and then forgets them when they can leave the nest. If you present them here to Jesus and then forget that this dedication means a pledge to train them in the Divine fear and love through all the passing years of childhood and youth.

What that life shall be lies with you. "Each mother," says a discerning poet, "is the mother of her infant's soul." They are God's adopted children. They have a birthright, and that is the love and fellowship of Christ. They are heirs of life.

But never, never forget that their inheritance is dependent, under God, on your own watchfulness, your own thoughtful care, your own example, your household religion.

Worldliness, social frivolity, a hollow example, a life without the Christian aim, without the godly walk and conversation on your part, the heads, the teachers, the stewards of these many Christian households only make all these consecrations at the Font a sad, hollow mockery.

But we learn, too, the spirit of the household affection which shall perform a momentous

part in giving the form to our piety. As we gaze upon that lowly household in Nazareth we recognize its true color and tone, we behold its divine as well as human grace. A firm steadfast training in reverent habits must lay the corner-stone of a manly holiness. But it must be the parental heart, the power of a genuine winning Christianity, that is not hard but tender, that bears and shows compassion, which you use, or Christian nurture will be but failure.

The aim of a true godly home is to plant its truth, its worship of Christ, in the affections. Its purpose shall be to rear the standard in the heart, and so to lay a solid basis of character. A formal piety, a religion which gains not the heart, may freeze the founts of belief and love in the young mind.

Ah yes, I have met too many parents, reverent, scrupulous, sincere, who have in their grey hairs mourned over evil children and harbored doubts of God's faithfulness. But it was not He but they who were unfaithful. They had presented a piety most grotesque and forbidding. They had transformed duty into a slavery, the Scriptures and Prayer and Church into a cold taskwork, and the harsh fetters of that loveless religion only at last broke the household tie.

This just mean between the frivolous and the pharisaic, between sanctimoniousness and worldliness is no easy stage of piety to attain. There have been some devout parents, who in his infancy, have vowed a first-born son to the

Christian ministry with the idea that the offering of Jesus in the Temple was a corresponding act. But this consecration of the first-born was not to the priesthood. It was rather that each in whatever calling, should feel that he was the servant of God.

At the same time it seems to me a most fitting custom and a solemn duty for the parents of a household to direct and train heart and brain of the first-born son with a view to entering on that holy work. Especially does it seem an imperative duty in this age when our youths seem to have their hearts bent toward money-getting and mere material success. Were this the law of each family, what a noble phalanx would the Church ever present to an aggressive world as, at the tap of her drum, there issued forth from each home a mail-clad priest ready to do service or to wage battle for the Captain of the Heavenly Host. And can we not say that the Christian homes of the day would be happier, more full of sunshine, more blessed and holy were each thus guarded by one of the Lord's white-robed sentinels?

We read in Old Testament story of one who, dwelling among heathen men, took to his hearth and to his bosom a wandering priest of God, and lo, the prosperity of his house from that day forth was increased. "Except the Lord build the house their labor is but lost that build it. Except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain."

Christian fathers, Christian mothers, consider your responsibility and your duty. Train up these olive-branches round about your table, not in the love and cares of the world, and vanishing amusements of time, but in the fear of God and in the earnest love of His holy service. Let Hannah's offering be yours too. A Samuel, consecrated to the service of God's house, a first-born trained to do service to a holy Master, in His sacred courts.

This then is the tone of family piety. It is to consecrate our everyday living. It is not to lead us to the thought that our religious life is something separate from our social ties, a hermit's self-punishments, but that which we shall bear with us into the Church of God, into the responsibilities of our traffic, into the talk, into the deeds of our real existence. Thus ought you to train your children. You are to instruct them that truth and affection and kindness and unselfish deeds are their daily religion.

Let each be taught that whatever may be the employments of his life he is to recognize them as ministerings and services to Jesus. This true education of the heart can be at the home only. It is the result of a father's temperate and wise counsels, and of a mother's unsleeping love and hourly watchfulness. It sinks, as nothing else will, deep down into the shafts of these human hearts. It binds the doctrines, and the sound principles of Christ to our best life with bonds that cannot be broken.

And it will yield its results. "The promise is to you and your children." If you exercise an unshaken fidelity in this loving duty you need have no fear. Although nothing is sure in this life of decay, although our early sowing may wither, yet it is surer than all else.

Blessed is the memory of such a home! It keeps us pure in temptations and selfish cares. The faith rooted in infancy, the prayers, the kindly deeds, the reverent habits, linger as guardian angels with us. They pass, as the features of the child, into the symmetry of Christian manhood; and even with many a weary prodigal it is the unforgotten love that has brought him back to his Father's house and heart.

Blessed! Our hearts echo it, may our lives exhibit it! May each home be like the cottage at Nazareth, the dwelling of a holy family.

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